DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 344 693 PS 020 519

AUTHOR Love, John M.; And Others
TITLE Transitions to Kindergarten in American Schools. Final Report of the National Transition Study.
INSTITUTION RMC Research Corp., Hampton, N.H.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Policy and Planning (ED), Washington, DC.'
PUB DATE 92
CONTRACT LC-88089001
NOTE 258p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC11 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Board of Education Policy; Community Involvement; *Disadvantaged Youth; Educational Environment; Evaluation Methods; Grade Repetition; *Kindergarten; Kindergarten Children; National Surveys; Parent Participation; Poverty; Preschool Children; *Preschool Education; Primary Education; Public Schools; School Policy; *Student Adjustment; *Transitional Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Continuity; Developmentally Appropriate Programs; Extra Year Programs (Kindergarten); Project Head Start; *Transitional Activities

ABSTRACT

This report includes an executive summary and describes results of a 1988 study of transition activities provided by public schools to enhance the continuity experienced by children as they move from preschool, day care, home, or other previous experience into kindergarten. Chapter 1 offers background information, including definitions of terms, the purpose of the study, and an overview of the methodology used. Demographics of the districts and schools surveyed are summarized. Chapter 2 presents survey findings on preschool and kindergarten programs in public schools. A profile of kindergarten programs based on a representative national sample of public schools is provided. Illustrations from site visits are included. Chapter 3 describes the nature and frequency of schools' transition activities and provides illustrations from site visits. Transition activities fall into two categories: (1) those that involve coordination or communication between school and preschool levels; and (2) those that involve parents. Chapter 4 assesses factors associated with the extent or prevalence of transition activities and discusses ways in which these activities can enhance the degree of continuity experienced by children. Chapter 5 presents conclusions, suggests implications for early childhood policy and practice, and offers recommendations for further research. Appended are 30 references and related materials. (GLR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED344693

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

TRANSITIONS TO KINDERGARTEN IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Final Report of the National Transition Study

PS 020519

Prepared under contract for
the Department of Education by:

RMC Research Corporation
Hampton, New Hampshire

Contract No. LC88089001

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION • OFFICE OF POLICY AND PLANNING

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

This report was supported by funds from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Policy and Planning, Contract No. LC88089001. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position and policy of the Department of Education.

Final Report of the National Transition Study

TRANSITIONS TO KINDERGARTEN IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Final Report to the Office of Policy and Planning,
U. S. Department of Education, Contract No. LC88089001
Elizabeth Farquhar, Project Officer

John M. Love
Mary Ellin Logue
James V. Trudeau
Katharine Thayer

With contributions by:

Diane D'Angelo
Dianne deVries
Jane Grover
Beatriz Martínez Kinnison
Patricia Seppanan
Ella Simmons
Bruce Yelton

RMC Research Corporation
1000 Market Street
Portsmouth, New Hampshire 03801

1992

RMC
RESEARCH CORPORATION
1000 MARKET STREET
PORTSMOUTH, NH 03801

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

Acknowledgments vii

Preface ix

I. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY 1

Introduction 3

The Importance of the Preschool-to-Kindergarten Transition 7

The Challenge of Studying Transition 8

Research Relevant to the Study of Transition 9

Components of Transition 9

Study Methodologies 10

Descriptions of the Survey and Site Visit Samples 12

II. CONTEXT FOR CONTINUITY: PRESCHOOL AND KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS 17

Introduction 19

Program Experience Prior to Kindergarten: Preschool Programs in Public Schools 22

Adjusting to Kindergarten 29

Retention and Extra-Year Programs 33

The Kindergarten Experience 37

Educational Approaches of Kindergartens 39

School Characteristics: Parent Involvement and Climate 45

District and School Policies and Practices 50

Summary 54

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

PAGE

III. **TRANSITION ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS** 57

Introduction 59

Extent of School Transition Activities 61

Connecting With Preschools 64

Welcoming Children and Parents 72

The Local Educational Context 77

Continuity Beyond Kindergarten 81

Summary 85

IV. **INFLUENCES ON CONTINUITY AND TRANSITION ACTIVITIES** 87

Introduction 89

Structural Arrangements, Transition Activities, and Approaches to Continuity 92

Regression Analysis of Survey Data 98

Structural Influences on School Transition Activities 100

Influences on Continuity 104

Summary: Influences on Transition and Continuity 114

V. **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS** 117

Conclusions About Transition and Continuity 119

Conclusions About the Public Schools in Which these Transition Activities Occur 122

Implications for Policy and Practice 125

Recommendations for Further Research 127

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

PAGE

REFERENCES 127

APPENDICES:

Appendix A: Selected Literature Review: Research Relevant to the Study of Transition A-1

Appendix B: Site Visit Summaries B-1

Appendix C: Methodology: Sampling, Survey Methods, Characteristics of District and School Samples, and Site Visit Methods C-1

Appendix D: Weighted Tabulations of District Survey Responses D-1

Appendix E: Weighted Tabulations of School Survey Responses E-1

Appendix F: Results of Factor Analysis and Regression Analysis F-1

Acknowledgments

The authors of this report are indebted to a large number of people who, for a variety of reasons, have made it all possible. Special thanks are due to the Office of Policy and Planning, U.S. Department of Education for their guidance and suggestions throughout the study. Members of our national advisory panel have provided critiques and reviews of our plans, methods, survey instruments, and draft reports, both in our three formal meetings and in more informal settings. For this important role in the project, we thank Steve Barnett, Barbara Bowman, Ellen Galinsky, Walter Hodges, Sharon Lynn Kagan, Mary Kennedy, Douglas Powell, and Herb Walberg.

Of course, the study could not have been accomplished without the cooperation of 846 district administrators and 1,298 school personnel who returned our surveys. Even greater contributions were made by staff and parents at the eight schools who allowed us to spend four or five days interviewing and observing for the indepth study. Although they are anonymous in this report, they know who they are, and we are deeply appreciative of all they taught us about the issues of trying to create better continuity for children.

We have also been blessed with hardworking and competent support staff who have contributed to survey design and mailing, data entry, and report production. We are very thankful for the direction of Susan Dumais, and her staff, including Faith Ballance, Judy Ballester, Judy Cercone, Betty Daly, Rob Dumais, Cheryl Ford, Wendy Hurley, Evelyn Jenks, Dawn Miller, and Angela Whiting.

Other colleagues at RMC have participated in site visits, helped pilot test instruments, designed the computer database, reviewed and edited numerous drafts of this report, and provided both moral and professional support. We therefore thank Ralph Adler, Everett Barnes, Sharon Beckstrom, Deb Brewer, Cliff Cox, Diane D'Angelo, Dianne deVries, Chris Dwyer, Jane Grover, Susan Klaiber, Beatriz Martinez Kinnison, and Pat Seppanen. Ella Simmons served as a team member for one of the site visits. A special word of appreciation goes to our former colleague, Bruce Yelton, who served as deputy project director for the first two years of the study and participated in the conceptualization and design of the surveys and in two of the site visits.

JML, MEL, JVT, KT

Preface

In 1988 the U.S. Department of Education launched two studies to investigate programmatic efforts in public schools that may be effective in retaining the benefits achieved by quality preschool programs serving disadvantaged children. This report describes the results of the study that investigated transition activities provided by schools to enhance the continuity experienced by children as they make the transition into kindergarten from their preschool, day care, home, or other previous experience. The second study examined promising parent education programs and is available as a separate report (Goodson, Swartz, & Millsap, 1991).

This report begins in Chapter I with background information including definitions of terms, statement of the study's purpose, and an overview of the methodology. The methodology section includes a summary of the demographics of the districts and schools surveyed.

Chapter II reports extensive information on kindergarten programs, giving the first national profile of kindergarten programs based on a nationally representative sample of public schools. The chapter also includes data on the prekindergarten programs housed in these schools. The national findings from the surveys are supplemented with illustrations from our site visits. Chapter II can be thought of as describing the school context in which the transition activities occur.

In Chapter III we turn to a description of school transition activities, again supplementing survey findings with more indepth information from the schools participating in the site visits. Chapter IV assesses factors that are associated with, and perhaps influence, the extent or prevalence of transition activities and discusses ways these activities can potentially enhance the degree of continuity experienced by children.

Finally, Chapter V presents our conclusions and suggests implications of these findings for early childhood policy and practice. Recommendations for further research are also included.

Several appendices provide important additional information: Appendix A includes a review of recent related research. Appendix B contains brief 3- to 4-page descriptions of the context and transition activities of each of the eight indepth sites. Appendix C gives details of the sampling and study methodologies. The district and school surveys used to collect our data are reproduced in Appendices D and E, with the national means and sample sizes given for each survey item. Technical details for some of the more complex analyses are given in Appendix F.

All differences between groups described in the text refer to statistically significant differences, unless otherwise indicated. Effects of poverty and size were analyzed using analysis of variance for continuous variables and chi-square for dichotomous variables. All analyses were conducted using the weighted data (see Appendix C) to account for the fact that schools appear in the sample with different probabilities depending on their sampling strata.

Transitions to Kindergarten in American Schools

Executive Summary of the National Transition Study

Through a combination of surveys and site visits, this study investigated how public schools are helping children make the transition into kindergarten. Joint inservice training for preschool and kindergarten teachers, a common approach to curriculum and instruction at each level, and early opportunities for children and their parents to become familiar with the kindergarten setting are examples of transition activities. Their aim is to create better continuity between the preschool and kindergarten experiences of children. Research has suggested that greater continuity can enhance the benefits of preschool programs, which may not endure beyond the early elementary grades.

The study surveyed nationally representative samples of 830 school districts and 1,169 schools with kindergarten classes midway through the 1989-90 school year. In addition, the researchers visited eight schools to analyze their transition activities and the contexts in which they occur.

Data from the surveys and site visits were analyzed to:

- describe the transition activities provided by the districts and schools,
- identify the major influences on school transition activities,
- describe the characteristics of prekindergarten and kindergarten programs located in the schools, and
- obtain estimates of difficulties children have adjusting to kindergarten.

Although the study did not investigate the impact of transition activities on children's development, it took the first step by documenting relevant public school practices. The results of the study can be summarized as answers to four questions which are discussed below. We first describe what has been learned about transition activities in schools, then examine school characteristics that support transition, and describe prekindergarten and kindergarten programs in the public schools. This report concludes with three broad implications for early childhood program policy and practice.

What Do Schools Do to Help Children With the Transition into Kindergarten?

Transition activities are not widespread in U.S. schools. Twenty-one percent of districts report a "wide range" of transition activities, and schools rarely provide more than a few of the many possible transition activities. For example,

- only 10% of schools report systematic communication between kindergarten teachers and previous caregivers or teachers about the entering kindergarten children;

- only 12% of schools have kindergarten curricula designed to build on the preschool program; and

- 47% of schools have a formal program for school visitations by parents.

This relatively low emphasis on transition may relate to the belief of school personnel that most children do not have much difficulty adjusting to kindergarten. Where problems do occur, however, adjusting to the academic demands of kindergarten is seen as the area of greatest difficulty, and more children are seen as having adjustment problems if they are entering high-poverty schools.[1] In fact, 33% of high-poverty schools report high levels of child difficulty adjusting to academic demands, a rate that is five times as high as that in low-poverty schools (6%).

Transition activities have achieved the status of formal policy in only 13% of the schools. While written policies are only a beginning, their presence may indicate the value school leaders place on transition.

Transition activities fall into two distinct categories -- those that involve coordination or communication between school and preschool levels and those that in one way or another include parents as participants. The former are in many ways more difficult to implement and are less common. We find only limited efforts underway in the following areas:

- coordinating prekindergarten and kindergarten curricula,

- establishing communication between staffs at both levels, either about the entering students or about their respective instructional programs, and

- providing joint training for staffs from both levels.

The easier-to-implement activities (those that involve parents in some way) occur more widely. They include such efforts as:

- welcoming incoming children and their parents with special orientations and visitations (81% of schools report that at least half of incoming children and parents visit their new school before the beginning of the kindergarten year),

- informing parents of entering students about their rights and responsibilities in the school, and

---

[1] We examined the effect of school poverty level on survey responses because the poverty level of families served by schools has been shown to relate to student achievement and resources allocation and because of its relevance to public policy. Three poverty levels were defined in terms of the percentage of students eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch: low poverty = 0-25%; moderate poverty = 26-50%; high poverty = 51-100%.

- involving parents in classroom activities designed to facilitate a smooth transition.

Which Schools Provide More Support for the Transition into Kindergarten?

The study explored five characteristics of schools: the presence of a prekindergarten program, the poverty level of the families served by the school, the size of the school[2], administrative support and leadership, and school climate.

The presence of a prekindergarten program within the school building (e.g., a state-funded preschool, local day care program, Head Start, or special education program) makes a difference in the prevalence of transition activities. Although there is little coordination and communication overall, when there is a prekindergarten program in the school, we find a greater degree of:

- transfer of records from the prekindergarten program to kindergarten,
- communication between kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers about students,
- communication between teachers at the two levels about curriculum issues,
- coordination of the two instructional programs, and
- participation of prekindergarten program staff in transition activities such as joint workshops, sharing information, assisting children with adjustment problems, and preparing individual children and parents for the transition.

At the same time, the site visits demonstrated that the presence of a preschool program in the school is no guarantee of greater transition efforts or continuity.

The type of transition activity is related to the proportion of children from low-income families in the school:

- there are more transition activities involving coordination and communication between preschool and school levels in high-poverty schools.
- there are more transition activities that involve parents in low-poverty schools.

It may be that high-poverty schools, in spite of their many challenges, have resources through Chapter 1, state funds for at-risk children, or other programs that facilitate this coordination and communication. These schools are more likely to house prekindergarten classes which may facilitate transition activities. These schools also have more children from Head Start programs, which may have initiated transition activities.

---

[2] We analyzed survey responses by school size because of the evidence suggesting that such characteristics as school climate, program diversity, access to resources, parent participation, staff interactions, and allocation of funds differ by size (with generally more positive characteristics associated with smaller schools). We defined three size categories: small = 1-300 students; medium = 301-500 students; large = 501 or more.

Although the size of the school is not a consistent factor, the size of the district is, with 84% of large, compared with 60% of small, districts having at least some transition activities.

Administrative support and leadership were found to be important. Schools have more coordination and communication with preschools when there are school staff who are assigned the responsibility for the transition activities. In the site visits, we observed that a district or school administrator has greater influence over schoolwide transition activities than do individual teachers.

There is more coordination and communication between prekindergarten and kindergarten levels when there is a positive school climate, with school personnel exhibiting more positive attitudes toward children and parents and having higher expectations for children's success in school.

What is the Nature of Public School Kindergarten Programs?

Through the surveys we are able to describe a number of features of the kindergartens that American children are entering. The "typical" kindergarten program in our public schools is a half-day program that enrolls 69 children, with a staff-child ratio of 1:16.

- Fifty-eight percent of kindergartners are in half-day programs, 37% are in full-day, and 5% are in programs that meet less frequently.
- Children in 82% of the schools are routinely assessed with standardized tests, screening, or readiness instruments for such purposes as individualizing instruction, determining program eligibility, referring to special education, and making placement decisions (retention, transition class).

The majority of schools employ retention and extra-year classes for kindergarten children who are considered not to be ready for first grade.

- More than half the schools (61%) retain children in kindergarten although, on average, these schools retain only 5% of the children enrolled in kindergarten.
- About 23% of all schools have transition classes which provide an extra year of schooling between kindergarten and first grade. Schools with transition classes assign 13% of their kindergartners to them as an alternative to first-grade placement.
- In total, 72% of public schools either retain children in kindergarten, place them in transition classes, or do both.

The study asked respondents to describe their classrooms for young children, using as a framework research on instructional practice that contrasts developmental, child-initiated practices with more academic, teacher-directed ones.

- School personnel report that, while the average kindergarten classroom is developmental in focus, it blends academic strategies, such as worksheets, basal readers, and large group instruction, with developmental approaches such as learning centers, small-group projects, and the involvement of children in establishing rules.

- In general, allowing children to select their own learning activities -- a hallmark of developmentally appropriate practice -- is reported as less likely to occur than any of the other developmental strategies.

Almost all schools provide opportunities for parent involvement at the kindergarten level.

- The most common opportunities are classroom volunteering (offered in 78% of the schools), learning activities for parents to do with their children at home (56% of schools), and parent education workshops (37%).
- Parents have fewer opportunities to be involved in school policies and operations; about one-third of schools have parents directly participating in setting school goals, long-range school planning, or parent involvement policies.
- Less than 15% of the schools have kindergarten parents who help set policies on kindergarten retention, select their child's teacher, or choose the school their child will attend.

Many characteristics of public school kindergarten programs are associated with the poverty level of the school, including length of day, staff-child ratio, parent education and parent involvement, developmental appropriateness, retention practices, assessment practices, and reliance on extra-year programs. In fact, the influence of poverty level is so dramatic that one cannot begin to think about the transition experiences in schools without taking it into account.

Among the many distinguishing characteristics of high-poverty schools are

- the prevalence of school based, federally- or state-funded prekindergartens;
- unique patterns of parent education (e.g., programs that include home visits, involvement in certain school policies);
- greater use of academic instructional practices;
- more assessment of prekindergarten children; and
- more use of transition classes and kindergarten retention.

High-poverty schools also report more full-day kindergartens, more problems on the part of children adjusting to school, and less positive staff attitudes toward parents and children than do moderate- or low-poverty schools.

School size is also related to important features of kindergartens, with small schools being more likely to have an academic focus and a favorable staff/child ratio. Small schools are less likely to have school-based prekindergartens, operate full-day kindergartens, assess entering children, or foster parent involvement. Small schools are also less likely to use transition classes and retention, but if they do, they retain more or place more children in transition classes.

What Kinds of Prekindergarten Experience Do Children Have in Public Schools?

School administrators estimate that about 40% of their entering kindergartners have had a formal prekindergarten experience, including nursery school, day care, Head Start, or Chapter 1 preschool. However, only about 27% of the schools have prekindergarten programs located in them. High-poverty schools are twice as likely as others to house prekindergarten programs (44% vs. 22%). The transition study provides national data on those prekindergarten programs that are located in the public schools.

- About half of the prekindergarten programs in schools are state funded or locally sponsored programs, 38% are special education programs, and 15% are Chapter 1 preschools.
- Most school-based prekindergarten programs base eligibility on age of the child, although federal and state-supported programs often have additional enrollment criteria such as family income, performance on some sort of screening test, or a handicapping condition of the child -- and 83% of the 4-year-olds in prekindergartens that are housed in public schools are in Chapter 1, Head Start, special education, or state or locally funded programs. Day care programs are least likely to have entry criteria other than age.
- Over two-thirds of the school-based preschool programs assess children with standardized tests, screening, or readiness instruments.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Based on information collected in the study, we draw three major implications for early childhood program policies and practices.

There is no single way to implement transition activities that will be appropriate for all schools. Our surveys and site visits show considerable variation in the types of transition activities implemented by public schools as well as a wide range of factors that influence the extent to which they occur. We also know that children entering public school kindergartens have diverse prior experiences, vary greatly in the extent of their difficulty adjusting to kindergarten, and in fact enter very different kinds of kindergarten programs. In some schools most of the kindergartners will come from a school-based preschool, whereas in other schools most children will have their prekindergarten experience in other settings. Furthermore, schools differ in the resources (space, staff, funding) that can be marshalled to aid transition efforts. These findings suggest that there can be no single recipe for creating continuity, but that different transition activities will be appropriate in different circumstances. This report describes a number of approaches to implementing transitions that may be useful for schools and preschools to consider.

Schools serving higher proportions of students from low-income families may need to exert special efforts to create preschool-kindergarten continuity. We found that, in a number of ways, high-poverty schools are implementing important transition activities: they are more likely, for example, to implement those activities that involve preschool-kindergarten coordination and communication (e.g., kindergarten-preschool teacher communication about children, and transfer of records from preschool to kindergarten). Although this provides the potential for creating greater continuity for children, as suggested above, there are other features of the high-poverty schools that lead us to expect that their transition activities will require greater effort: incoming children are judged to have greater difficulty adjusting to kindergarten, and entering kindergartners are less likely to have been enrolled in a prekindergarten program (preschool, day care, etc.). High-poverty schools have a greater academic focus in kindergarten, and they are more likely to create an extra year through kindergarten retention or placement of children in transition classes. Furthermore, transition activities that involve parents are less common in high-poverty schools. Thus, new strategies for reaching low-income parents may be necessary.

School staff need a clearer understanding of developmentally appropriate practice. Most schools consider their kindergarten programs to be "developmental," yet they rate themselves relatively low on some of the key classroom activities that early childhood educators define as developmental practice. Research on children's learning, as well as the recommendations of a number of national organizations, suggests the importance of developmentally appropriate practice and discourages grade retention and extra-year programs for young children. The National Governors' Association's strategies for achieving the national education goals include developmentally appropriate preschool programs and age-appropriate expectations and activities in kindergarten. If school administrators and teachers believe they have already adopted a developmental orientation, they are less likely to see the need to change, yet their self-reports suggest that there is a considerable gap between classroom practice and the strategies needed for achieving quality kindergartens.

The conduct of this study and the preparation of this report were sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Policy and Planning, under Contract LC88089001, Elizabeth Farquhar, Project Officer. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education.

The full report, Transitions to Kindergarten in American Schools, may be obtained by calling (202) 401-0590 or writing to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Policy and Planning, Planning and Evaluation Service, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Room 3127, Washington, D.C. 20202-4244.

CHAPTER I: PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Introduction
The Importance of the Preschool-to-Kindergarten Transition
The Challenge of Studying Transition
Research Relevant to the Study of Transition
Components of Transition
Study Methodologies
Descriptions of the Survey and Site Visit Samples

I. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Issues in Transition: Three Children Begin School

Angela entered a full-day kindergarten program in a moderate-poverty school. She had no prekindergarten program experience. She and her mother attended the kindergarten orientation held the previous spring, and Angela was eager to go to school. Because Angela was so verbal and always asking questions, her mother was convinced that she was "ready." Besides, parents were assured that the only requirement was age, and Angela would be 5 a month after entering kindergarten. About half of the children in Angela's kindergarten had attended preschool while the other half were, like Angela, coming from home. Separation from her mother was extremely difficult for Angela, and she cried inconsolably several times during the day, sometimes because she missed her mother, other times because she was hungry but was told it was not time to eat. She became irritable and drowsy during the late morning when she typically napped at home. She demanded teacher attention by yelling or by pulling on the teacher's clothing when the teacher was busy with other children. Angela had no experience with scissors, crayons, or pencils and little with books. She did not have a "school sense" about waiting her turn or sitting in her seat and showed little readiness for the formal kindergarten curriculum. While it was only the first month of school, the teacher strongly suspected that Angela would not pass the district's end-of-year test and would spend two years in kindergarten.

Following a year in Head Start, Daniel entered the full-day kindergarten that is housed in the same building. The school principal describes her kindergarten as "academically focused," with emphasis on basic skills in a predominantly teacher-directed environment. Daniel knew his letters, numbers, and colors, could cut and write his name, and passed the kindergarten readiness test with flying colors. In Head Start, with teachers and parent volunteers, there were always many adults in the room. Someone was available to intervene before an altercation occurred and redirect Daniel's boundless energy in more constructive ways. To Daniel's kindergarten teacher, however, he was a fighter and troublemaker. He was a very curious, self-directed child with definite interests and preferences. He would wander off to the block area when he should have been doing his seatwork and cried when brought back to his seat. At other times he sang to himself while working, which the teacher found disruptive. Daniel resisted resting after lunch, then fell apart an hour before school ended. His mother had volunteered regularly in Head Start, but her offer to help in kindergarten was discouraged; the teacher feared Daniel might be even more uncontrollable with his mother present. The Head Start teachers had written a detailed report about Daniel's learning style and how to engage him. The kindergarten teacher, however, had not read the report as she wanted to make her own judgments about children without being prejudiced by other teachers' opinions. Daniel had loved Head Start and threatened the kindergarten teacher that unless school got better soon, he would "pack up his cubby and move back to Head Start."

After a year in a highly developmental, private preschool, Sarah entered kindergarten in a suburban elementary school in a middle-class neighborhood. Both the preschool and kindergarten programs were morning programs. Sarah and her family visited the kindergarten program in the spring prior to kindergarten entry. Kindergarten children were phased in during the first week to help children adjust to the larger group. Sarah's mother volunteered regularly both in preschool and kindergarten and attended several of the educational workshops for parents. Sarah began to read in preschool using a whole language approach and these skills were continued in kindergarten where a similar approach was used. Sarah had several bathroom "accidents" during the first few weeks of school, and her kindergarten teacher was concerned about Sarah's adjustment. Sarah's mother was also baffled by this new behavior. At the end of September each year, all community preschool and kindergarten teachers meet to discuss any adjustment problems children may be having and plan their joint inservice meetings for the year. At this meeting, Sarah's kindergarten teacher discussed Sarah's difficulty. The problem was not unfamiliar to the preschool teacher, who reminded the kindergarten teacher that the classroom structure of the two programs was different and might be responsible for the problem. In kindergarten, children had to leave the classroom and travel down the hall alone to a bathroom that is shared by older children. By calling upon one of the parent volunteers or having another child accompany Sarah to the bathroom, what may have become a more serious problem was quickly solved.

Application to the Present Study

These composite cases are hypothetical, but the events they describe are real. They illustrate many of the factors that may influence the quality of children's transition to kindergarten. Influences range from simple structural considerations, such as location of bathrooms or timing of snacks in kindergarten, to more complex issues such as pedagogical inconsistency between programs, attitudes toward parents, and the effects of poverty on programs. This study of transition considers these multiple school circumstances and influences, as well as the diversity of children served.

Purpose of the Study

Quality preschool programs can have important long-term benefits for disadvantaged children, but they do not always do so, nor do their benefits necessarily endure. One way to enhance the benefits of early childhood programs may be for schools to provide programs and services that smooth the discontinuities children frequently experience when making the transition from preschool or home into kindergarten. This study describes such programs and services in the public schools and provides a profile of the kinds of transition activities that currently exist in American schools, along with the contexts in which they occur. This study does not, however, examine the impact of these transition activities on children's later school achievement. Investigation of this important question is left to future research.

The overall purpose of the transition study is to learn more about the ways in which today's public schools are helping children make the transition into kindergarten. Specifically, the following questions guide this inquiry:

- What are the characteristics of prekindergarten programs in public schools?
- What are the characteristics of kindergarten programs?
- To what degree are children perceived to have difficulty in the transition from preschool to kindergarten?
- What is the context of the kindergarten program and of transition activities?
- To what degree does the district or school have an organized approach for providing transition activities?
- What are the major influences on school transition activities?

The first four questions are answered in Chapter II; Chapter III addresses the fifth question; and the question on influences is dealt with in Chapter IV of this report.

At a time of unprecedented collaboration between the Departments of Education (ED) and Health and Human Services (HHS), there is increased interest in transition. The new Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Program funded by the Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), the Head Start-school partnerships initiative jointly sponsored by HHS and ED, and efforts underway by the regional educational laboratories (also with joint ED and HHS funding) are all raising public consciousness about transition. It is hoped that the results of this study will guide elementary schools and preschools as they develop, implement, or improve transition activities.

Defining Continuity and Transition

Although specifically studying transition, this study is also necessarily concerned with the degree of continuity or discontinuity that children experience as they enter the new world of formal schooling. **Continuity and discontinuity refer to the experience children have as they move from one environment to another.** If the two environments are similar or compatible, there is continuity of experience. The behaviors children learn in the first setting will be appropriate in the second, and adults will respond to children in the second setting in ways that are consistent with the expectations established in the first.

If the two environments are different or incompatible, children may experience discontinuity as they go from one to the other. Children may suddenly find that established ways of responding are no longer appropriate or that their experiences have not prepared them for knowing how to behave in the new environment.

In situations where the two settings are different, it is possible to reduce the discontinuity experienced by children through additional experiences that prepare the child for the new situation. Thus, when two settings are similar, children make a smooth transition with few adjustment difficulties; when the two settings are different, continuity can be created. **For purposes of this study, transition refers to those activities initiated by schools or preschools to bridge the gap between the preschool and kindergarten experiences.** This understanding of continuity-discontinuity suggests a two-pronged approach for studying the phenomenon.

In order to investigate the nature and degree of continuity experienced by children as they enter kindergarten, we need both (a) to compare the characteristics of their preschool and kindergarten environments and (b) to analyze any activities provided by the preschool and kindergarten programs that are designed to assist with the transition. The first analysis (a) assesses the degree of continuity; the second (b) examines transition activities. This study focuses on the latter, but we also take important strides toward analyzing the issue of continuity.

There is no inherent value in continuity for its own sake. Some discontinuity of experience is a normal part of maturation. Children learn from new experiences, and over time learn that expectations vary in different settings. The concern here is that transitions for young children may be overly abrupt and that children may go from a situation that is appropriate for their age and developmental levels to one that is not. Transitions, therefore, cannot be studied without reference to the types of programs involved.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Within the early childhood education community, a strong consensus has emerged around the report, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8* (Bredekamp, 1987). This document, which is based on research about how young children learn, forms the basis for professional accreditation of early childhood programs. Although difficult to summarize briefly, the term "developmentally appropriate" practice is used to describe an approach to early childhood education that builds on each child's abilities and interests through active exploratory learning, small-group work, and opportunities for children to select their learning activities from a variety of choices. In a developmentally appropriate classroom, the teacher primarily acts as a guide or facilitator of learning.

Developmentally appropriate practice is generally contrasted with an "academic" approach in which teachers directly instruct children, predominantly in large groups, and rely on paper-and-pencil activities such as worksheets and flashcards. In academic-style classrooms, teachers encourage children to master isolated facts and skills in a prescribed order. When we use the terms "developmentally appropriate" and "academic" in this report, we refer to these contrasting approaches, as they are used in the literature. At the same time, we recognize that, in practice, it may be rare to find classrooms that clearly adhere to one approach or the other.

The Importance of the Preschool-to-Kindergarten Transition

Changing Nature of Kindergarten

Much of the concern about the transition from preschool to kindergarten is brought about by changes in the nature of kindergarten, as documented in a number of studies. Karweit (1988) summarized changes in kindergarten programs over the last 20 years: enrollment has expanded; the curriculum has become more academic; the students are older; and the days are getting longer. Hitz and Wright (1988) and Freeman and Hatch (1989) have also found increased emphasis on academic skill development in kindergarten.

Other indications of this trend include:

- kindergarten teachers experiencing pressure to have children learn more of the basic skills;
- states requiring children to pass a test to "graduate" from kindergarten into first grade;
- parents desiring more reading and math in kindergarten (71% of them, according to a survey by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Perrone, 1988);
- publishers producing easy-to-use work sheets for teachers, some of whom have little formal training in early childhood education and may use these materials in a developmentally inappropriate way;
- extra year classes for children deemed not ready for kindergarten or first grade.

Those who take a developmental approach to learning believe that an academic style of instruction is incompatible with the way in which young children learn. As evidence continues to mount that public school kindergartens are becoming more and more academic, there is increased concern with how young children will adjust to these academic demands. Because children entering kindergarten frequently face a classroom and school situation that is qualitatively different from their preschool experience, there is fear that the differences may disrupt the learning and development process.

Developmental Agenda of 4- and 5-Year-Olds

Another reason for focusing on this transition point is that children enter kindergarten with tremendous diversity in their physical skills, social and emotional maturity, and intellectual abilities. Children entering kindergarten display a range of skill levels within a common developmental agenda. This agenda includes the growth of self-awareness and self-concept; the learning of gender roles; the development of peer relations; the formation of simple symbolic concepts and language development; the mastery of increasingly complex physical skills; the acceptance of extended separation from parents; increased attention span; development of self-control; and learning independent self-help skills. Taken as a whole this agenda represents a tremendous set of tasks to be accomplished in a very short time. It is no surprise then that the adjustment to the kindergarten setting is not only frequently difficult for children but critical for future school success.

The Challenge of Studying Transition

A study of transition must encompass much more than a cataloging of discrete events or activities; it involves an analysis of the range of organizational and institutional philosophies, intentions, and activities related to the transition period. Discrete activities may not be sufficient to create continuity. For example, a parent night or an afternoon visit to kindergarten, designed to ease entry to the new setting, have relatively little importance in the overall transition picture if institutions are operating with different philosophies about what constitute the important classroom experiences for 5-year-olds. Thus, we have tried to assess school decisionmakers' beliefs and understandings as well as to describe the dimensions of preschool and elementary school programs.

Yet there are limits to this study as well. Although we have a nationally representative sample of schools, our data on preschool practices come only from school-based programs. We recognize that features of homes, day care centers, family day care, and other preschool programs affect the degree of continuity children experience, but these are not the focus of this study. It is recognized that children who have not been in formal prekindergarten programs bring different experiences to their school setting. We also acknowledge that classroom teachers address transition issues on a daily basis as they help children adjust to the classroom routines and expectations. These subtle day-to-day activities are important and should be examined in future studies that can go beyond the methodologies of this one.

The transition study is timely. It occurs at a time when the White House and the National Governors' Association have announced six education goals, the first of which is to ensure that young children will succeed in school (National Governors' Association, 1990). Based on growing evidence that preschools can benefit disadvantaged children, public schools are expanding their involvement in prekindergarten programming. 1990 legislation has resulted in a new demonstration program that is creating Head Start-public school collaborations for implementing transition activities. Recently, concern about the high school dropout problem has focused educators' attention on the early school experiences of at-risk youth and raised questions about practices such as retention and extra-year programs. Professional groups (e.g., National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 1990; National Association of State Boards of Education [NASBE], 1988) recognize the value of providing transition activities to promote continuity and are advocating increased cooperation and coordination between preschool and kindergarten, higher levels of parent involvement, and curriculum alternatives to retention and extra-year programs. These events present a real opportunity for elementary schools to build upon the benefits of preschool and to further enhance the early educational experience of disadvantaged children.

Research Relevant to the Study of Transition

There has been little research on the transition between preschool and elementary school. There has been extensive research, however, on a multitude of programs for disadvantaged children -- preschool education, compensatory education, home-based approaches, day care, parent and family education, Head Start, Follow Through, bilingual education, migrant education, and so forth. Not all findings are congruent, but many studies find at least short-term effects and there is accumulating evidence of long-term benefits from some efforts, such as comprehensive, intensive preschool programs for disadvantaged children.

In defining program elements to study in relation to the transition into kindergarten, we have relied on experience from a number of areas: (a) research on effective preschool programs, (b) research on effective elementary school programs, (c) evidence about the elements of quality programs at both the elementary and preschool levels, and (d) experience from the few existing systematic efforts to create and study preschool-kindergarten transition. A review of this research is presented in Appendix A.

Components of Transition

Critical Ingredients of Transition

We know, with a great deal of certainty, the general characteristics of quality preschool programs (Griswold, Cotton, & Hansen, n.d.; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1984; Schweinhart, 1988). Similarly, the results of effective schools and instructional strategies research are now accepted as broad guidelines for implementing quality elementary school programs (e.g., Connecticut State Department of Education, 1984; Edmunds, 1979; Knapp & Turnbull, 1990). The challenge of this study was to build on these sources of knowledge in order to describe the characteristics of current transition efforts and to begin to understand the elements of continuity that may be important in young children's development.

Our review of the literature suggests three critical ingredients of transition processes. There must be (a) preschool programs that have the potential for producing benefits that are worth retaining, (b) an effective elementary school program, and (c) an effective transfer process -- activities and events (over and above the preschool and school programs) that are designed to overcome the discontinuities that may disrupt children's learning and development. This study reports data on all three of these ingredients.

Efforts to ease children's transition into kindergarten, particularly for disadvantaged children, make intuitive sense and are gaining support in the field (ACYF, 1991; NAESP, 1990; NASBE, 1988). Yet, there is little research documenting the value of continuity or the effectiveness of transition activities for children's later school success. As the field of early education moves toward supporting greater public school involvement in preschool education, increased coordination and collaboration between public schools and preschools, and more parent involvement at both levels, studies examining the effectiveness of various transition efforts will be helpful and necessary.

Prior to such efforts, however, baseline data describing the present state of practice are needed. This study presents such data. At a time of rapid change in early education, such baseline information is vital for evaluating changes and guiding responsible public policy for all children.

Study Methodologies

The study was designed to get information on transition activities through nationwide surveys, supplemented with indepth information from eight schools at which the research team witnessed transition activities first-hand. This section summarizes the methods used for the surveys and site visits:

- district survey
- school survey
- site visits

This discussion is followed by descriptions of each of the samples. Details of these procedures and samples are provided in Appendix C.

Survey Methods

A stratified random sample of 1,003 public school districts containing kindergartens was selected with high-poverty-level districts and districts with large enrollments oversampled. The sample was stratified by size and poverty level (for both the district and school samples). All responses were analyzed by district and school size and poverty level because these factors are often related to educational practice.

There is considerable evidence that both district and school size are significant variables in influencing student achievement (e.g., Eberts, Kehoe, & Stone, 1984; Howley, 1989; Walberg & Fowler, 1987). Explanations offered in the literature for the generally positive effect of smaller schools or districts include possible differences in school climate, program diversity, access to resources, parental participation, staff interaction, and allocation of funds (Fowler & Walberg, 1991).

District and school poverty levels have also been shown to relate to student achievement and resources allocation. In their national assessment of Chapter 1 programs, Kennedy, Jung, and Orland (1986) found that school achievement of all students (not only the ones from low-income families) declined as the proportion of low-income students in the school increased. The poverty levels of districts and schools are also related to resources that may be available through various federal and state programs, such as Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and Head Start. And beyond the resources themselves, these programs have requirements or guidelines that may result in the higher-poverty schools and districts having different types or degrees of activities (such as parent involvement) that are less common in low-poverty schools. School or district poverty level is also of interest because of the Department of Education's special responsibility for programs serving disadvantaged children.

Two schools with kindergarten classes were randomly sampled from each district (unless the district had only one). All data were weighted in the analyses to take into account the different probabilities of individual districts appearing in the sample. Thus, the findings are generalizable to all public schools and districts with kindergartens.

The surveys were completed between November 1989 and March 1990. We received responses from 85% of the sampled districts and 78% of the sampled schools. Forty-one percent of the district surveys were completed by the district superintendent (with 31% by another district administrator, 20% by an elementary school principal, and 6% by "others"); 84% of the school surveys were completed by the school principal.

Site Visit Methods

Preliminary analyses of survey data in February/March 1990 were used to select schools to be visited. In addition, responses to a district survey item asking for nominations were reviewed, as were suggestions from members of the study's advisory panel and other experts in the field. We reviewed these data and nominations in an effort to identify eight schools with substantial transition activity taking place. The schools were to serve at least 50% disadvantaged children and represent diverse circumstances. Even though more than 60 potential sites were thus identified, we found none that could be thought of as having a comprehensive, articulated transition "program." Instead, we identified eight schools exhibiting a variety of types of transition activities and strategies in the following range of situations:

- schools in all types of settings, from small towns and rural areas to large inner-city areas;
- schools with at least 40% of their students eligible for free or reduced price lunch (five are above 75%);
- student bodies with diverse racial/ethnic characteristics;
- some with half-day kindergarten, some with full-day, and one with another arrangement;
- one with a transition class, one with a readiness class;
- varying practices regarding retaining children in kindergarten;
- schools with a variety of types of preschool programs; and
- some with preschools in the schools, others without.

Following two days of training, two- to- four-person teams spent four or five days at each of the eight sites. We interviewed district administrators, principals, and kindergarten teachers; conducted focus-group discussions with parents and preschool teachers; and observed kindergarten and preschool classrooms with a commonly used instrument for describing early childhood program environments.

Descriptions of the Survey and Site Visit Samples

We describe the highlights of the samples here as background for the findings in Chapters II, III, and IV. More details about the survey respondents, including descriptive figures and tables, can be found in Appendix C; detailed descriptions of the eight sites are in Appendix B.

District and School Demographics

District and school enrollment size and poverty level are important variables in the findings presented later. Table I-1 defines the categories used in analyzing district survey responses; both of these variables were obtained from the commercial database from which our sample was selected. Table I-2 defines size and poverty level categories for the schools; these categories were created from our analysis of the survey returns.

Table I-1: District Size and Poverty Level Categories

District Size Category	Definition (Enrollment)	Percent of Sample Districts in Category	Mean (Median) District Enrollment in Our Sample
Small	1-999	49%	425 (365)
Medium	1,000-4,999	40%	2,264 (1,988)
Large	5,000 or more	11%	16,476 (8,926)

District Poverty Category	Definition (Percent Below Poverty Level)	Percent of Sample Districts in Category	Mean % of Children Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch
Low	0%-10%	43%	15%
Moderate	11%-25%	42%	32%
High	26%-100%	15%	53%

Table I-2: School Size and Poverty Level Categories

School Size Category	Definition (Enrollment)	Percent of Sample Schools in Category	Mean Enrollment of Sample Schools
Small	1-300	32%	195
Medium	301-500	34%	400
Large	501 or more	34%	703

School Poverty Category	Definition (% of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-Price Lunch)	Percent of Sample Schools in Category	Mean Poverty Level of Sample Schools (% of Students)
Low	0-25%	37%	13%
Moderate	26-50%	32%	37%
High	51-100%	31%	71%

Table I-3 shows the number and percentage of sample schools in the nine groups created by these school size and poverty categories.

Table I-3: Number and Percentage of Sample Schools in the Nine Poverty/Size Groups

School Poverty Level	School Size			
	Small	Medium	Large	Total
Low	116 10.0%	167 14.4%	139 12.0%	422 36.5%
Moderate	126 10.9%	129 11.1%	120 10.4%	375 32.4%
High	125 10.8%	101 8.7%	134 11.6%	360 31.1%
Total	367 31.7%	397 34.3%	393 34.0%	1,157 100.0%

Urban-Rural Distribution

One-third of the sample schools are in small towns, 27% are in urban fringe/suburban areas, 25% are in rural settings, and 15% are in urban/central city areas. Eighty-four percent of small schools are in rural or small-town settings, whereas 41% of large schools are in areas respondents categorize as urban fringe. Medium-size schools are more equally divided among small-town, urban fringe, and urban central city areas (see Appendix B for details). Poverty level also varies with urbanicity. Low-poverty schools are most prevalent in urban fringe and small-town areas; high-poverty schools are split between urban central city and rural areas.

Racial/Ethnic Distribution

Table I-4 shows the racial/ethnic distribution of students in our sample districts and schools. As might be expected, this overall distribution varies significantly by district and school size and poverty level (see data in Appendix C). In general, the larger the district or school and the higher its poverty level, the higher the proportions of minority students. For example, minority students constitute 9% of the enrollment in small low-poverty schools but 67% of large high-poverty schools.

Table I-4: Racial/Ethnic Distribution of Students in Sample Districts and Schools

Racial/Ethnic Group	Percent of Enrollment	
	Sample Districts	Sample Schools
American Indian, Native Alaskan	1.0%	0.8%
Asian	3.0%	3.5%
African-American	17.9%	14.4%
Hispanic	10.1%	10.7%
White	68.1%	70.5%

Chapter 1 Enrollments

An important characteristic of schools to consider when assessing any activities that may be affected by federal programming is the presence of Chapter 1 programs. Chapter 1 is the major federal compensatory education program, and the increased interest in early childhood and parent involvement in Chapter 1 may affect children's transition and the continuity of services. Across all the schools in our survey, 18% of the students are considered eligible for Chapter 1 services, and 16% of all students are currently (1989-90) receiving services. As would be expected, these rates are greatly affected by school poverty level. In high-poverty schools 33.9% of all children are receiving Chapter 1 services; in low-poverty schools 6.3% are (see Appendix C for a more detailed breakdown).

Grade Level Configurations

Three-fourths of the schools in our sample operate with a K-6 grade span. About 12% are K-8 schools and 8% K-3. Grade level configuration varies by school size and poverty level. For example, 94% of large moderate-poverty schools are K-6, but only 50% of small high-poverty schools are; the latter are more likely to be K-8 or K-12 schools.

Descriptions of Sites

This section describes the eight schools visited and their feeder preschools. There are more details about each in Appendix B. Table C-7 in Appendix C summarizes key characteristics of the sites (e.g., school enrollment, percent eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch, racial/ethnic distribution, type of preschool in building, retention rates). We use pseudonyms throughout when referring to these schools.

Pioneer Primary School enrolls 793 students in prekindergarten through grade 3 and is located in a small town in a rural southeastern area. Several features of the school made it interesting as a site: a school-based prekindergarten program that serves two-thirds of the preschoolers in the county; coordinated preschool and kindergarten curriculum; the use of transition classes in the school; and a state-mandated effort in early childhood education and transition that requires the use of the High/Scope curriculum in preschool.

Plainville Elementary School, a small rural school in the midwest, serves children in prekindergarten through fourth grade. Key aspects of Plainville Elementary include a kindergarten program in the process of changing from academic to a developmental focus and a state-funded preschool program for children judged high-risk that must adhere to guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The site provides an opportunity to study how access to external funding and strong local leadership can influence the growth of continuity in a school located in a small, homogeneous community.

The work being done by the **Hillside Elementary School** to enhance continuity with migrant Head Start children and families in the southwest led to its inclusion in this study. Bilingual/ESL programs are an important part of this K-8 school because over 90% of the children are Spanish-speaking and 40% are from migrant families. Approaches enhancing continuity include a "developmental kindergarten" for children deemed not ready for regular kindergarten; a coordinated developmental and language-oriented curriculum in preschool and kindergarten; and a number of informal activities involving staff and parents.

The **Bear Valley School** is located in a suburban area in a northwestern state, this school serves approximately 240 students in grades K-6. A high percentage of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Unique features of the program that contribute to continuity of practice include an adherence to an educational focus on the whole child by staff, strong leadership from the principal, shared ownership of a child-centered approach by the staff, and numerous school-community partnerships. Of special interest for this study is Bear Valley's coordination with Head Start and other preschools that are not located in the school.

Seaview Magnet School in one of our southern states, is a magnet school stressing the creative arts. It has a long history of offering a cooperative preschool program that successfully draws non-minority children back to the public schools. It also offers Chapter 1 prekindergarten classes serving primarily disadvantaged students. Seaview illustrates a wide array of factors that contribute to continuity in educational practices in an urban setting: co-location of preschool and kindergarten classes, a shared vision and close collaboration among staff, strong parent involvement, multi-age instructional grouping practices, and a coordinated PK-3 curriculum unit.

On the west coast, **Lakeside School** features a community-centered transition program. The school has a small half-year preschool as part of the elementary school, but the focus of the transition program is on community coordination. An advisory council consisting of kindergarten teachers, preschool teachers, administrators, and community members helps plan the activities. Joint inservice training and formal visitation programs are part of their program, as are efforts to register incoming kindergarten children at their preschool sites, and a formal visitation program between preschool and kindergarten teachers that is coordinated by an outside agency.

Southside Early Childhood School in the northeast is an urban magnet school serving a high-poverty population. Outstanding features of the school include its coordinated preschool through grade 2 program and a principal who has actively encouraged coordination efforts among the teachers and between parents and the school. Teachers and administrators actively educate parents on an ongoing basis about the value of developmental activities for children. The school has discontinued standardized testing in kindergarten.

Westside School is located in a large northeastern urban inner-city neighborhood. In a situation that combines high poverty, great cultural diversity, and overcrowding, the principal and staff have worked hard to create a positive, caring atmosphere. To date, efforts have concentrated on building relationships with parents and the development of a child-centered K-5 program. Special transition activities are designed to smooth the entry of children into the kindergarten program.

CHAPTER II: CONTEXT FOR CONTINUITY: PRESCHOOL AND KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Introduction
Program Experience Prior to Kindergarten: Preschool Programs in Public Schools
Adjusting to Kindergarten
Retention and Extra Year Programs
The Kindergarten Experience
Educational Approaches of Kindergartens
School Characteristics: Parent Involvement and Climate
District and School Policies and Practices
Summary

II. CONTEXT FOR CONTINUITY: PRESCHOOL AND KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Introduction

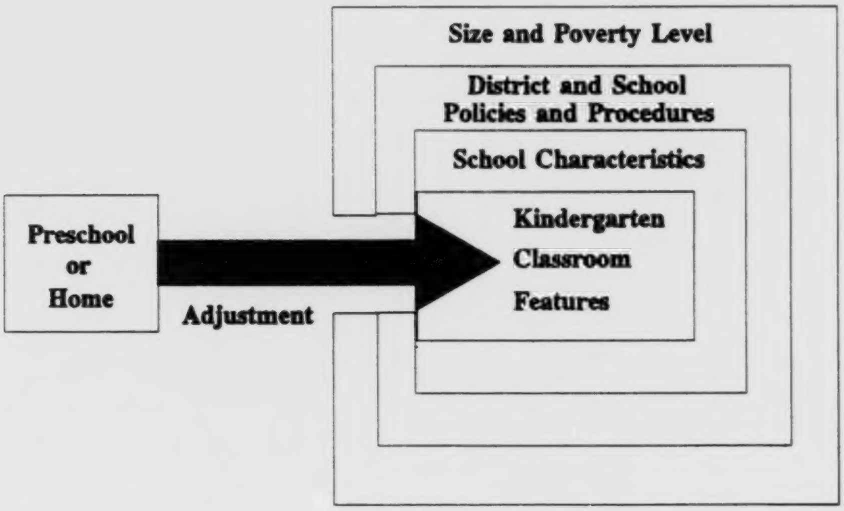
Focus of Chapter

This chapter presents district and school survey findings on preschool and kindergarten programs in the public schools and in doing so provides an important context for understanding school transition activities, which are the subject of Chapter III. In Chapter II, we focus on the survey responses, which reflect a nationally representative sample of schools. At appropriate points throughout the chapter, we present illustrations, examples, and vignettes from our site visits where these provide an important perspective or add understanding to the national data. (These vignettes are included in boxes to distinguish them from the survey results.)

Plan for the Chapter

Following the highlights of findings, this chapter begins to describe the context for continuity and transition with children's experience in the year preceding kindergarten, considers the difficulties children have as they enter formal schooling, and then describes their kindergarten experience. These areas, which are depicted in Figure II-1, can be thought of as factors that influence children's early school experience and their adjustments in kindergarten.

Figure II-1: Areas of Children's Early School Experience Described in this Chapter


Size and Poverty Level
District and School Policies and Procedures
School Characteristics
Preschool or Home
Adjustment
Kindergarten Classroom Features

The chapter begins at the left of Figure II-1, describing what we learned about children's program experience prior to kindergarten, including descriptive characteristics of the prekindergarten programs found in public schools. As children go from preschool (or home) into kindergarten, they must make a number of adjustments; the second section of this chapter discusses children's adjustment difficulties as reported by school personnel.

The third major section of the chapter is devoted to an analysis of public school kindergarten programs. Our presentation begins with kindergarten program features that most directly impact the child -- the smallest box on the right side of Figure II-1, which represents within-classroom characteristics such as program size, adult/child ratio, length of day, and the kindergarten instructional program. Next, two features of the school environment are described -- parent involvement and school climate. Finally, somewhat further removed from the child's immediate experience, but potential influences on children's school experience, are district and school policies and practices. These include policies and practices related to kindergarten entry criteria, testing, and parent involvement in district policy and operations.

Throughout this presentation, it is recognized that, in addition to these variables, there are two features of the school environment (represented by the outer box) that have an overriding influence on how children experience kindergarten. These are the size of the school (and district) and the poverty level of the families whose children attend. Wherever size or poverty level significantly affect our findings on classroom, school, or context variables, the effect is presented in text and figures. The highlights of the chapter's findings are presented next.

Highlights of the Findings

There are seven major features of the school context revealed by our analyses:

- 40% of incoming kindergarten children are estimated to have had some type of formal prekindergarten experience. About one-quarter of schools have prekindergarten programs, most of which formally assess children with standardized achievement or readiness tests. Almost all of the programs provide opportunities for parent involvement.

- The average school reports that between 10% and 20% of incoming kindergartners have difficulty adjusting to kindergarten, with the area of greatest difficulty seen as adjusting to the academic demands.

- More than half the kindergarten children attend half-day programs with staff-child ratios averaging 1:16. A very high percentage of schools (82%) routinely test kindergarten children. Almost all offer some activities for parent involvement. While most programs call themselves developmental, the average kindergarten classroom blends teacher-directed academic activities, such as worksheets, with child-initiated developmental approaches.

- Retaining children in grade (holding back) and assigning children to extra-year programs (such as special transition classes) add an additional year to some children's schooling. In total, 72% of public schools either retain children in kindergarten, use transition classes, or do both, with 18% of kindergartners being assigned an extra year of schooling in these schools.

- More than half the schools (61%) routinely retain kindergarten children, with an average of 5.3% of the kindergarten children in those schools being retained.

- Approximately one-fifth of all schools have extra-year classes for children prior to their kindergarten year and another fourth of schools have transition classes for children between kindergarten and first grade. In schools with transition classes, approximately 13% of kindergarten children go into them rather than into first grade.

- All of the above experiences are affected by the school's size and/or poverty level.

Program Experience Prior to Kindergarten: Preschool Programs in Public Schools

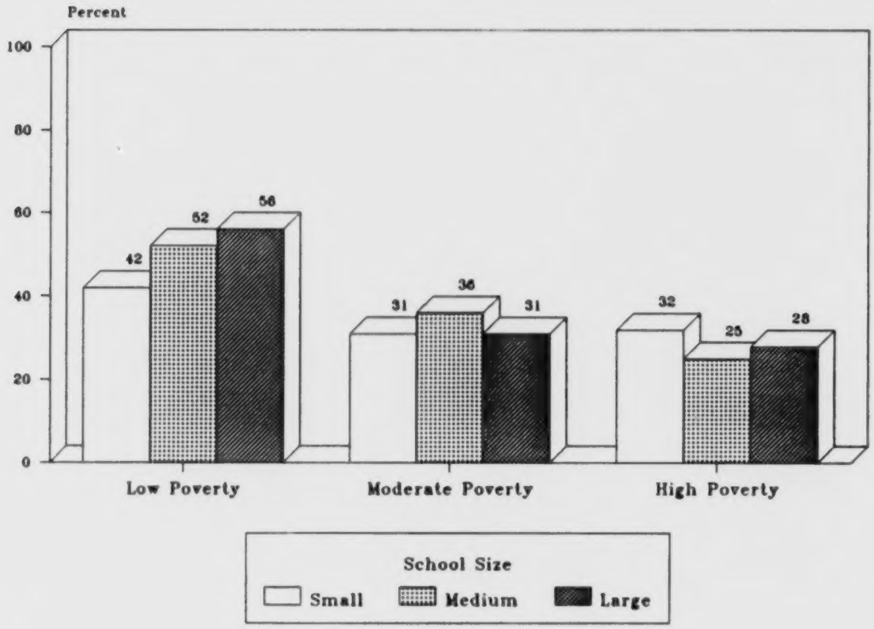
This section reports the percentage of children with formal prekindergarten experience and describes school-based preschool programs. It depicts the prevalence and types of programs in schools, eligibility criteria for children in the various programs, extent of assessment in programs, and opportunities available for parents to become involved. While it is expected that the different experiences children have prior to entering kindergarten will affect the continuity they experience, this study collected data only about the formal program experience of children who attend preschool in the public schools.

Percentage of Children with Program Experience

Schools estimate that approximately 40% of their current kindergartners were enrolled in day care, preschool, prekindergarten, or nursery school prior to kindergarten entry. (This figure is an estimate because, unless these data are gathered by schools, administrators typically do not know how many children have had preschool experiences or what type of experience they have had.)

Generally, low-poverty schools estimate higher percentages of children with prior program experience, although size and poverty interact (e.g., 56% of the children in large, low-poverty schools vs. 25% in medium-size, high-poverty schools). This variation is shown in Figure II-2.

Figure II-2: *Percentages of Children Estimated to Have Prekindergarten Program Experience, by School Size and Poverty Level*



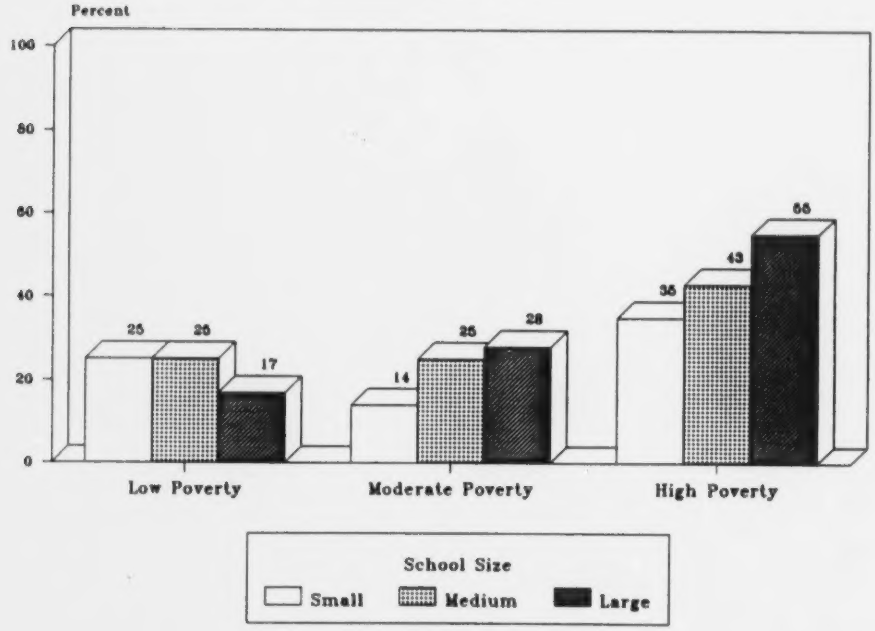
Prevalence and Duration of Programs in Schools

Twenty-seven percent (27%) of schools sampled have preschool programs. Our data suggest that there are 12,100 schools in the country with prekindergarten programs.

As shown in Figure II-3, high-poverty schools are twice as likely to house preschool programs as moderate- or low-poverty schools are: 44% of high poverty schools report having preschool programs while only 22% of moderate- and low-poverty schools report having such programs. High-poverty schools, regardless of size, are most likely to have preschool programs; however, large, high-poverty schools are more likely (55%) to have such programs than are small (35%) or medium-sized high-poverty schools (43%).

The strong effect of school poverty level on the prevalence of prekindergarten programs may be the result of extra funding for at-risk preschoolers that is available from Chapter 1, Head Start, or state programs.

Figure II-3: ***Percentages of Schools With Prekindergarten Programs by School Size and Poverty Level***



These school-based prekindergarten programs have been offered an average of 6.2 years, with large schools (7.3 years) having offered them longer than small (5.8 years) or medium-size schools (5.4 years). Large, low-poverty (9.3 years) and large, moderate-poverty schools (8.5 years) have offered the programs the longest.

Types of Preschool Programs in Schools

Figure II-4 shows the distribution of four types of preschool programs by school size and poverty level. The most common type of preschool program in schools is a state or local program administered by the district. These occur in 51% of the schools that have preschool programs. Their prevalence is significantly related to school poverty level. The only other type of prekindergarten program that is fairly common is special education, which accounts for 38% of the prekindergarten programs reported by schools. Special education preschools are less frequent in high-poverty schools, and are more frequent in medium-size schools.

Chapter 1 preschool programs, while low in incidence (4% of all schools) are especially common in large, high-poverty schools (10% of all high-poverty schools and 36% of high-poverty schools with prekindergarten programs). Thus, more than one-third of the preschool programs in large, high-poverty schools are funded through Chapter 1. Day care programs administered by an outside agency occur in 8% of the schools, with day care administered by the district in 4% of the schools with prekindergarten programs. Head Start programs are found in 19% of the schools with prekindergarten programs, and other prekindergarten programs administered by an outside agency are reported by 6% of the schools. (The percentages of types of programs total more than 100% because a given school may have more than one type.)

The prevalence of Head Start programs, whether administered by the schools or by an outside agency, also varies substantially, as is to be expected given program enrollment guidelines. Figure II-4 shows this distribution. Overall, 12% of schools with prekindergarten programs have Head Start administered by an outside agency, and 7% have Head Start administered by the district. (This does not reflect the prevalence of Head Start programs nationally, since only about 20% of them are operated by public schools.)

Figure II-4: ***Percentage of All Schools With Four Types of Prekindergarten Programs by School Size and Poverty Level***

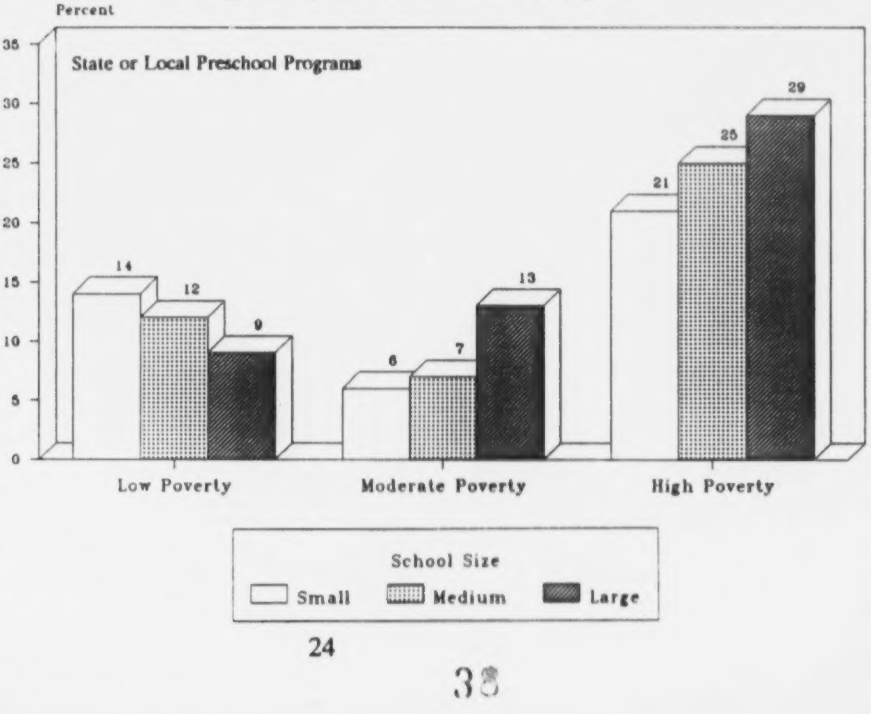
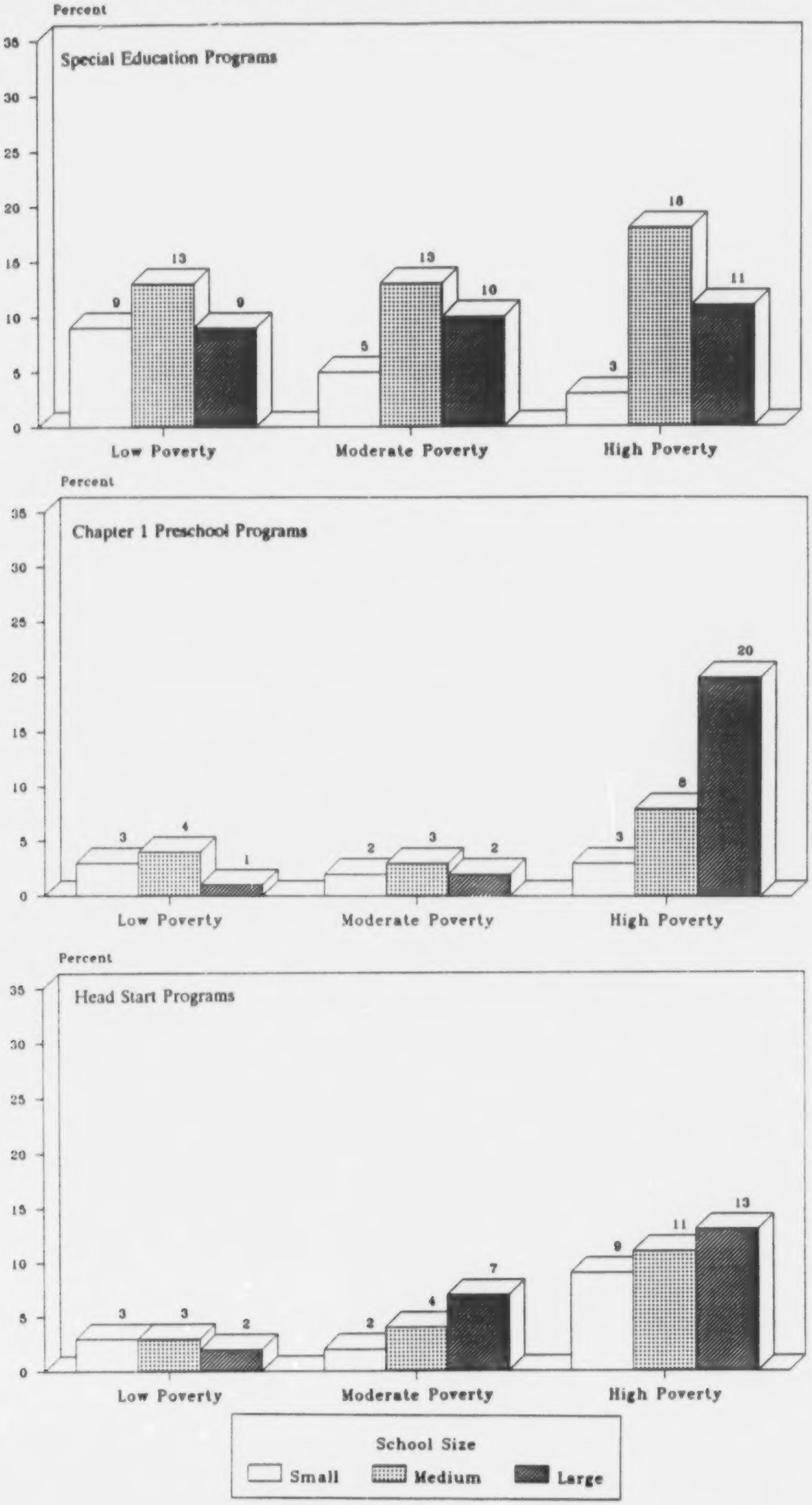
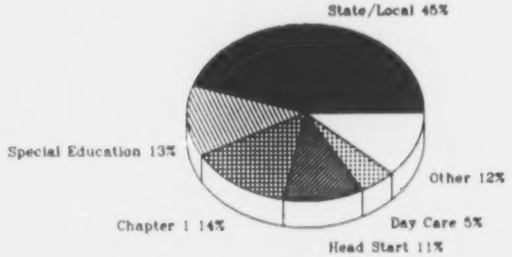


Figure II-4: ***Percentage of All Schools With Four Types of Prekindergarten Programs by School Size and Poverty Level*** **(continued)**



By looking at the average percentage of children at each school who are enrolled in each type of program, we get a slightly different perspective on the prevalence of preschool programming. Prekindergarten programs funded through state or local sources enroll more children than any other (45%). The percentages of children enrolled in five types of preschool programs are shown in Figure II-5.

Figure II-5: ***Average Percentages of Children Enrolled in School-Based Preschool Programs***



Preschool Enrollment Criteria

Schools were asked what the enrollment criteria are for each type of prekindergarten program found in the school. The results are reported in Table II-1. Only day care is commonly reported to have no enrollment restrictions: 57% of schools with day care said there are no enrollment restrictions. For the other types of programs, age is the most common criterion, cited by about 90% of the schools with state/local preschools, Head Start, or Chapter 1 preschools.

For Head Start, family income is cited as frequently as age (92%). Handicapping conditions are included among the Head Start criteria by just over half the schools. For Chapter 1 preschools, test results are second only to age in frequency of use; their use is reported by 74% of the Chapter 1 preschools, which is almost twice the percentage of any other type of program in using test results. The survey doesn't tell us what types of tests are used, but Chapter 1 guidelines require that children be selected based on educational disadvantage, and suggest that readiness tests, teacher observation, and diagnostic measures be used. State and local prekindergarten programs are the only other type with substantial reliance on test results. Day care programs are most likely to have no enrollment criteria.

Based on enrollment data provided by respondents, it appears that the majority of school-based preschool programs (65%) do not enroll handicapped children, although 22% serve handicapped children exclusively and another 13% enroll some handicapped children. As Figure II-5 shows, 13% of the preschool children in public school programs are in special education classes. As Table II-1 shows, prekindergarten programs have different criteria for enrolling children. In spite of these differences, all preschool programs are grouped together for our subsequent descriptions of assessment practices and parent involvement since the number of programs of each type is too small for reliable analyses at that level.

Table II-1: ***Enrollment Criteria in Schools with Prekindergarten Programs***

Enrollment Criteria	State/ Local Pre-K	Head Start	Day Care	Chapter 1	Other
Age	91%	92%	53%	90%	78%
Family Income	27%	92%	20%	21%	19%
Test Results	38%	9%	6%	74%	27%
Handicapping Condition	31%	53%	6%	24%	29%
Physical/Health Status	20%	20%	13%	13%	22%
Limited English Proficiency	27%	6%	6%	33%	12%
Other	13%	3%	0%	8%	7%
No Eligibility Criteria	7%	4%	57%	5%	13%

Not only is minimum age a factor in prekindergarten enrollment, but maximum age may also be a consideration. In one of the indepth study sites with a developmental state-supported prekindergarten, program policy requires that age-eligible children be placed in kindergarten after participating in the prekindergarten program. Problems arise for prekindergarten teachers at this school who would, if not for the policy, recommend that children spend another year in prekindergarten if they lack the behavioral self-control or academic skills necessary for success in the academically oriented kindergarten. While teachers understand that the policy is meant to encourage kindergarten programs to be flexible enough to meet the needs of a range of children, they are hesitant to send one of the children they consider "unready" into a program where expectations are higher than the child's current level of performance.

Assessment in Preschools

Over two-thirds (69%) of the schools with prekindergartens assess entering children with standardized tests, screening, or readiness instruments. These tests or instruments are used primarily for two major purposes, as reported by the school respondents:

- In 67% of the schools that do preschool testing, teachers use the results to individualize instruction.
- In 65%, tests are used to meet federal or state reporting requirements.

Less commonly, tests are used in making classroom assignments (22% of schools) or for other purposes (20%).

Assessment is more common in high-poverty schools (79% report it) than in either moderate-poverty (68%) or low-poverty (59%) schools. As we have seen, high-poverty schools are more likely to have federal programs (i.e., Chapter 1) in which test results are reportedly used as enrollment criteria with high frequency. Large schools are more likely to assess prekindergarten children (76%) than are either medium-sized (69%) or small schools (58%). The larger schools, as we have seen, are also more likely to house federal programs.

Parent Involvement in Preschool

It is assumed that parent involvement in preschool may affect children's transition to kindergarten. Parent involvement, mandated in federal and many state/local programs, provides opportunities for parents to become involved in a variety of ways. One-way communication from schools to parents in the form of letters, calendars, and newsletters is the most common activity, while more intensive activities such as parent education and home visits are the least common. We did not obtain data for actual rates of parent participation.

The percentages of schools reporting that they provide opportunities for seven types of parent involvement are as follows:

- Letters, calendars, newsletters: 92%
- Teacher-parent conferences: 85%
- Parents as classroom volunteers: 71%
- At-home learning activities to support school objectives: 61%
- Parent education workshops and courses: 53%
- Parent education including home visits: 43%
- School committees: 43%

It is interesting to look not just at the types of parent involvement but at the range of different activities in which parents might participate. There were eight activities listed on the survey (including "other"), and only about 10% of preschools report providing fewer than three. Seventeen percent provide three, 18% provide four, and 53% provide five or more. The average number of activities provided is 4.5, with large, high-poverty schools providing the greatest number (5.2), and medium-size, moderate-poverty schools providing the fewest (3.8).

Adjusting to Kindergarten

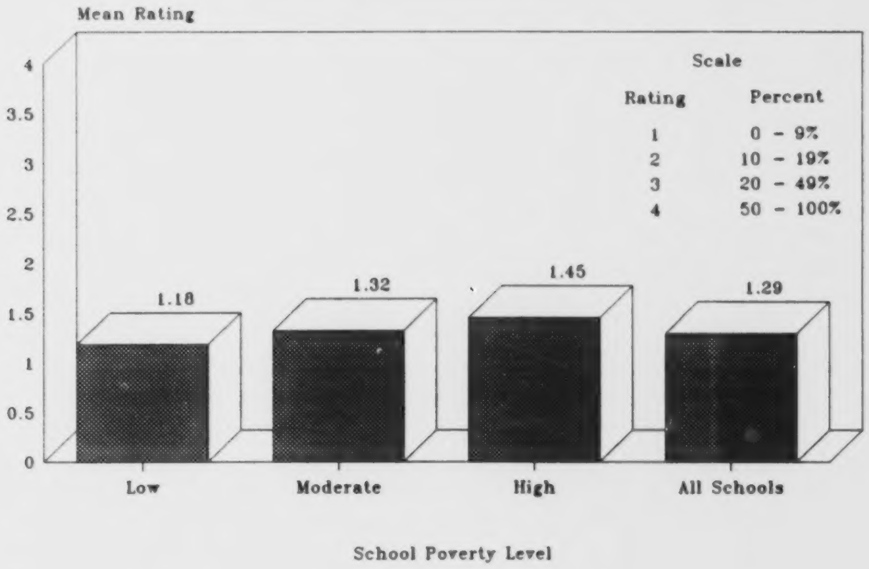
One way of gauging schools' perceptions of the importance of transition activities is to examine the extent to which children appear to have difficulty adjusting to kindergarten. We asked survey respondents to estimate the percentage of children in their district (or school) who have difficulty adjusting to various aspects of kindergarten by checking one of four categories: 0-9%, 10-19%, 20-49%, and 50-100%, coded 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively. The percentages of responses in each category are shown on p. E-11 in Appendix E.

Overall Difficulty Adjusting to Kindergarten

Respondents first rated the overall difficulty of adjusting to kindergarten. The mean rating for all schools is 1.29. Based on the response scale, this means that the majority of school respondents feel that less than 10% of incoming children have difficulty adjusting to kindergarten. As noted below, however, there are some types of adjustment in which the percentage is more than twice that figure.

High-poverty schools report greater overall adjustment difficulty for their incoming students (1.45) than moderate-poverty schools (1.32), with low-poverty schools reporting the least difficulty (1.18). Figure II-6 shows these differences. Since these are estimates by the school respondents, we do not know whether children in high-poverty schools actually experience greater adjustment difficulty or are simply perceived as having greater difficulty. This is consistent, however, with the fact that fewer children entering high-poverty schools have had some type of formal prekindergarten program experience.

Figure II-6: ***Mean Estimates of Overall Difficulty Children Have Adjusting to Kindergarten by School Poverty Level***



Adjusting to Specific Demands and Expectations

In addition to the overall rating of difficulty adjusting to kindergarten, the average rating across ten specific adjustment areas (such as academic demands, behavior expectations, length of the school day) was analyzed. For both district and school data, factor analysis showed very clearly that these items form one factor. The schools' estimates of children's adjustment difficulties in each of these ten areas are discussed next.

The academic demands of kindergarten create the greatest difficulty for the highest percentage of children. Figure II-7 shows the mean ratings by school size and poverty level, and illustrates the nature of the relation between children's adjustment to academic demands of kindergarten and school size and poverty. This relation is similar to the one found with most of the adjustment items. In the high-poverty schools, between 10 and 19% of the children are perceived as having difficulty adjusting to the academic demands of kindergarten, compared with less than 10% for children entering low-poverty schools.

Figure II-7: ***Mean Estimates of Difficulty Children Have Adjusting to the Academic Demands of Kindergarten by School Size and Poverty Level***

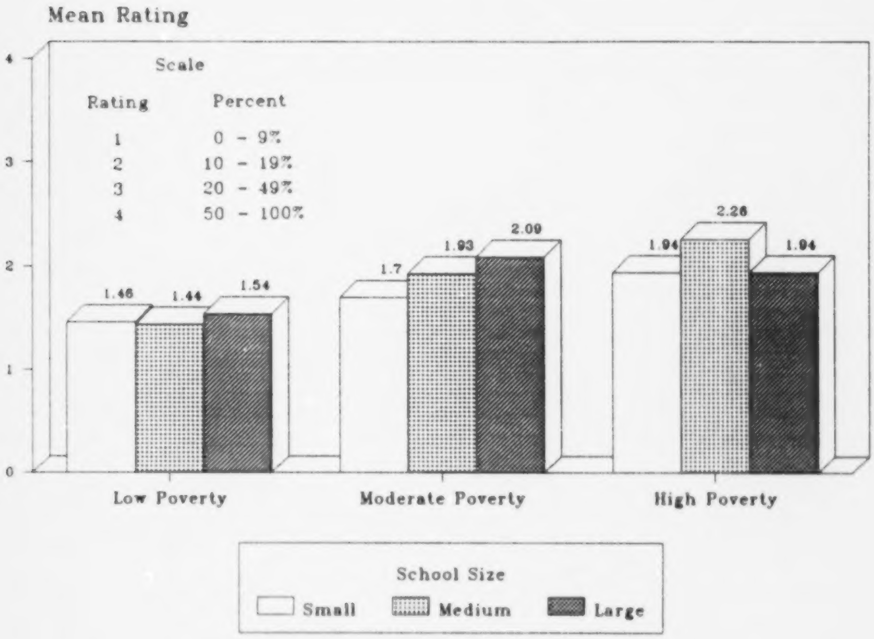
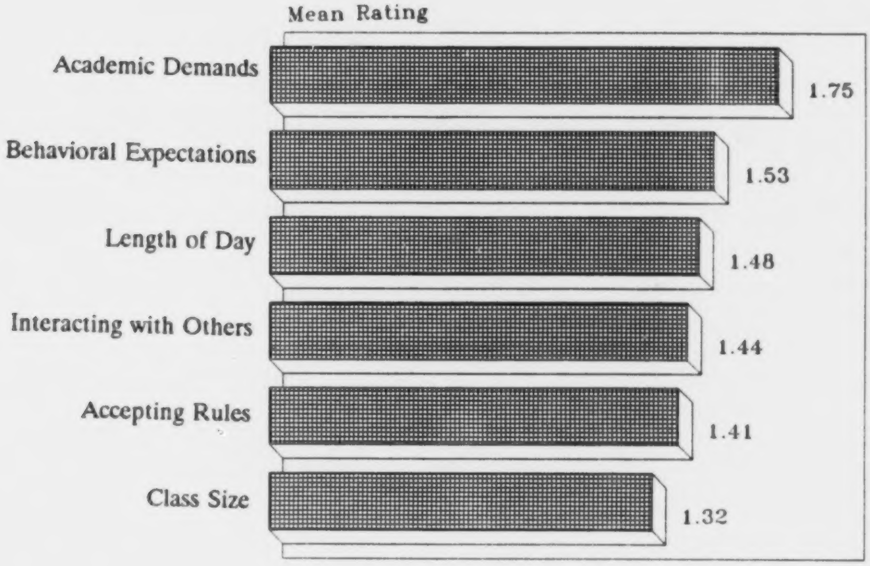


Figure II-8 displays the mean ratings of difficulty children have in adjusting to six aspects of kindergarten. After academic demands, the areas that are next highest in perceived adjustment difficulty are *meeting the behavioral expectations of kindergarten* (mean of 1.53) and *adjusting to the length of the school day* (mean of 1.48). Difficulties in meeting behavioral expectations are greater in schools with higher levels of poverty and with larger enrollments.

There is also an effect of poverty on adjusting to the length of the school day, with low-poverty schools reporting the least student difficulty (mean of 1.29), high-poverty schools reporting the most difficulty (1.75), and moderate-poverty schools falling in between (1.51). As noted in a later section ("The Kindergarten Experience"), high-poverty schools are more likely to have full-day kindergartens, perhaps partly accounting for the greater adjustment difficulties.

Figure II-8: **School Estimates of Difficulties Children Have Adjusting to Various Aspects of Kindergarten**



Interacting with other children is the next most troublesome area of difficulty, with a mean score of 1.44. Low-poverty schools (mean of 1.34) report this to be less of a problem than moderate-poverty (1.52) or high-poverty (1.49) schools.

Accepting the school's rules and discipline is slightly less of an adjustment problem. The average school rating is 1.41, with a significant size-by-poverty level interaction.

Difficulty *adjusting to the size of the kindergarten class* is perceived as almost as much of a problem with a mean school rating of 1.32. Once again, the poverty level of the school interacts with school size: Medium-size, high-poverty schools report the greatest difficulty (1.55) and small, low-poverty schools the least (1.14), even though higher-poverty schools tend to have more favorable staff-child ratios.

Another way to view these findings is in terms of the percentage of children estimated by schools as having various adjustment difficulties. As an indication of high levels of difficulty, we looked at schools that estimated 20% or more of their incoming children had any of the adjustment difficulties. The following are the percentages of schools with high levels of adjustment difficulties in six areas:

- meeting academic demands: 18% of schools
- meeting behavioral expectations: 11% of schools
- adjusting to the length of day: 11% of schools
- interacting appropriately with other children: 7% of schools
- accepting the school's rules and discipline: 7% of schools
- getting used to size of kindergarten class: 7% of schools

The significant effect of school poverty level described above shows up dramatically in this context. For example, 32.5% of high-poverty schools report high levels of difficulty meeting the academic demands of kindergarten; this is five times the percentage in low-poverty schools (6.4%).

In the site visits, staff and parents expressed their views about the problem of adjusting to kindergarten in a variety of ways. Parents of preschoolers at the Hillside school had very few concerns about their children making the adjustment to kindergarten (they expressed more concern about their own opportunities for parent involvement). Parents in Plainville voiced concerns that their children would have some difficulty with the academic demands of kindergarten, but teachers we met did not share those worries; kindergarten teachers are more concerned with children's behavioral or social "readiness," in part because of experience with children having difficulty with the initial separation from parents. Westside teachers and administrators had implemented learning centers in which children of varying abilities could participate and expected that the kindergarten would adjust to the abilities and needs of incoming children.

Retention and Extra-Year Programs

While the percentage of children experiencing difficulty adjusting to kindergarten may seem low, the reality of having two to four children struggling with adjustment in a class of 20 can greatly affect the kindergarten experience for all teachers and students in that class. Many children will successfully adjust over the course of the kindergarten year, but what happens to those children who do not? Two solutions adopted by some schools when children do not succeed in kindergarten are retention and extra year programs. Extra-year programs are generally of two types: readiness classes designed for children deemed not ready for kindergarten, and transition classes for children who finish kindergarten but are considered "not ready" for first grade.

Kindergarten Retention

Sixty-one percent of the schools in our sample retain kindergartners. Averaging across all schools, including those that do not retain, schools estimate that 3.6% of the previous year's kindergartners are retained in kindergarten. In those schools that retain, 5.3% of kindergartners are held back.

Low-poverty schools (65%) are more likely to retain some children than are high-poverty schools (55%), with moderate-poverty schools in between. More high-poverty schools than lower-poverty schools do not retain any children but for those that do, they hold back, on average, more children than do lower-poverty schools. There is a significant school size-by-poverty interaction, although generally a higher percentage of low-income children and children in small schools are retained each year.

Because this study focused on the preschool-to-kindergarten transition, we learned most about the practice of retaining children in kindergarten. Our site visit experience, however, suggests that retention in first grade, rather than in kindergarten, may be a more common practice in some districts. Only two schools of the eight said they were philosophically opposed to retention. Pioneer Elementary reported retaining about 75% of its transition class members in first grade and said they retain other first graders as well. This raises the question of investigating the transition between kindergarten and first grade in future studies.

Extra-Year Programs: Readiness Classes

Approximately one-fifth of the responding schools (21%) report having one or more readiness classes for children who are "old enough for kindergarten but who are not considered developmentally or academically ready for kindergarten." These classes are more common in low-poverty schools (where 31% have them) than in moderate-poverty schools (21%) and are least common in high-poverty schools (7%).

The results of readiness/screening tests are used by 83% of the schools with readiness classes, thus constituting the most common selection criterion for readiness classes. Joint parent-teacher recommendations (59%), kindergarten teacher recommendations (53%), the recommendation of the prekindergarten teacher (53%), and parent requests (50%) are other frequent reasons schools assign children to readiness classes. Somewhat less commonly used are the recommendation of the principal (34%), recommendations of an external agency (23%), or the school counselor (22%). Other selection methods are found in 10% of the schools. Responses to the same item on the district survey yielded almost identical results so are not presented here.

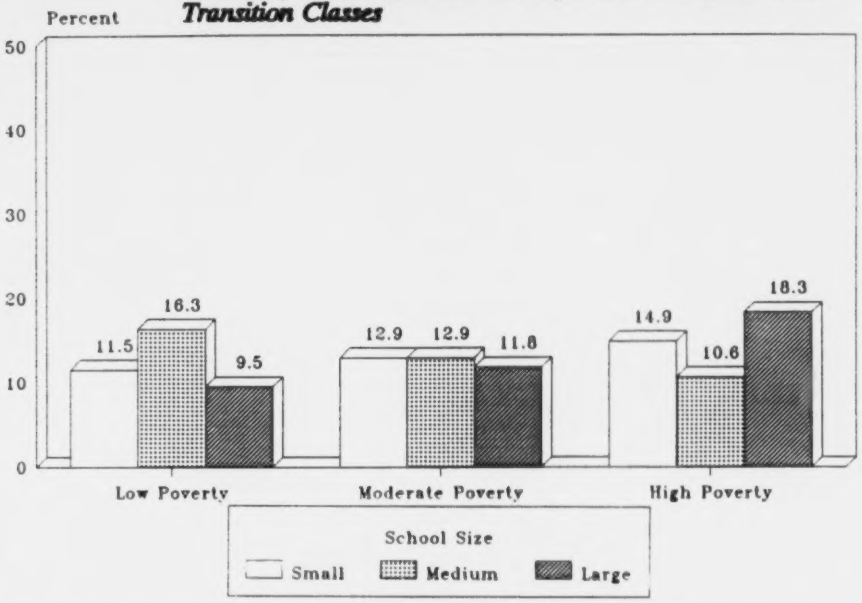
> Readiness classes can be, but need not be, extra-year classes, as we found in our site visits. The "developmental kindergarten" in Hillside appears to function as an alternative kindergarten program primarily for bilingual migrant children, almost all of whom are placed in first grade the following year, right on schedule.

Extra-Year Programs: Transition Classes

In recent years, one response of U.S. public schools to children who are not seen as ready for first grade has been to enroll them in an extra-year program following the regular kindergarten year. This extra year after kindergarten is often referred to as a transition class.

Nearly one-quarter of the schools have transition classes (23%) and they are more common in large schools (32%) than in medium-sized (23%) or small schools (14%). (School poverty level is not related to whether or not the school places children in transition classes.) For schools with transition classes, about 13% of the previous year's kindergartners are placed in them. (Overall, 3.7% of all U.S. kindergartners are placed in transition classes according to the school surveys.) This percentage is significantly affected by school size and poverty, however, with the highest rates in large, high-poverty schools and medium size, low-poverty schools, as shown in Figure II-9.

Figure II-9: ***Percentages of Kindergartners Who Go Into Transition Classes by School Size and Poverty Level in Schools With Transition Classes***



In schools that have transition classes, three selection criteria predominate. The most common criterion is the recommendation of the kindergarten teacher, which is used by 90% of schools with transition classes. Nearly as many respondents report using scores on readiness/screening tests (81% of schools), and a similarly large percentage report that it is a mutual parent-teacher decision (80% of schools). Somewhat less frequent but still common are districts and schools where children are placed in transition classes at the parents' request (45% of schools with transition classes), the recommendation of the school counselor (22% of schools), or the recommendation of the first grade teacher (23% of schools).

It is fairly uncommon for a district to report that the selection criteria are decided by individual schools (13%), or for schools to say that the selection is made on the basis of an external agency recommendation (4% of schools) or some criterion other than those listed (17% of schools). Schools were asked what role parental consent plays in the placement of children in transition classes: Two-thirds (67%) say it is required, 27% say it is sought but not required, and 6% say it is not part of the decision. Parental consent for children to attend transition classes is more likely to be required in low-poverty schools (81%) than in moderate-poverty (55%) or high-poverty (54%) schools.

Our experience at the indepth sites suggests that transition classes may simply be another form of grade retention. In one site, where there is sharp discontinuity when children enter first grade after a developmental preschool and kindergarten experience, 40% of the kindergartners are placed in a transition class following their kindergarten year. Of those attending the transition class, 75% go into first grade rather than second.

Transition Classes and Retention in Kindergarten

When the practices of retention and transition classes are considered together, we find that 72% of the schools do one or the other, or both. The percentage of first graders who are older than their peers is undoubtedly even higher since some parents hold their children out of kindergarten for a year, a phenomenon that was not investigated in this study.

The Kindergarten Experience

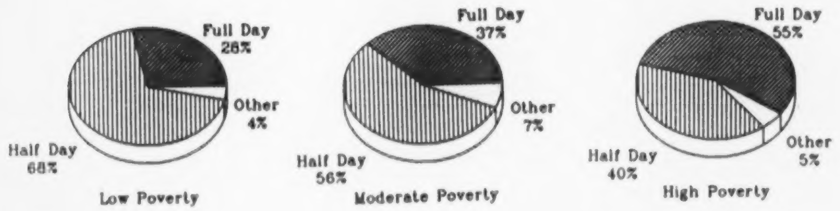
For those incoming kindergarten children without a formal prekindergarten experience, kindergarten presents a very new experience. These children may need to learn about participating as a group member, sharing adult attention, spending long periods of time away from parents, and engaging in new academic and play activities. Factors that could affect continuity for children as they move from their previous settings to kindergarten occur at different levels as described earlier in connection with Figure II-1. At the classroom level, children directly experience different lengths of day and various educational approaches, as described next.

Length of the Kindergarten Day

Half-day kindergartens are the norm for U.S. schools. Overall, 58% of kindergartners attend daily half-day programs, 37% are in daily full-day programs, and 5% follow other schedules (e.g., half-day twice a week). In the survey, we defined a full-day program as four or more hours per day; half-day programs meet every day for less than four hours.

As Figure II-10 shows, school poverty level has a dramatic effect on kindergarten scheduling. Full-day programs account for the majority of the total kindergarten enrollment in high-poverty schools, significantly more than in moderate- or low-poverty schools. It may be that federal or state program funds are used to provide longer kindergarten days in the higher-poverty schools. Half-day programs account for more of the kindergarten enrollment in low-poverty than in moderate or high-poverty schools.

Figure II-10: *Percentage of Children in Full-Day, Half-Day, and Other Kindergartens by School Poverty Level*



Although not as powerfully as poverty level, school size is also related to the type of kindergarten program. Daily full-day programs account for significantly more (42%) of the kindergarten enrollment in large schools, with 36% in medium-size schools and 27% in small schools. The percentage of children in half-day kindergartens is between 55% and 63% across the three school sizes.

Program Size and Staffing

Based on the school surveys, the 37% of schools with full-day kindergartens enroll an average of 69 students, with 3.1 teachers, and 1.4 aides per school. Half-day programs exist in 57% of the schools, averaging 69 students, 1.9 teachers, and 0.7 aides.

Staff/Student Ratios

Staff/student ratios were calculated for both full-day and half-day programs. For full-day programs the average ratio is 1:17. For half-day programs, the average ratio is similar (1:16).

Poverty alone does not significantly affect staff/student ratios, but significantly interacts with school size. Small, high-poverty schools have the best ratio regardless of whether programs are half-day (1:10) or full-day (1:13). Moderate-poverty, medium-sized schools running full-day programs have the highest reported adult-child ratio (1:23). Again, the high-poverty schools with more federal or state program funds, may use those funds for adding staff.

Educational Approaches of Kindergartens

Developmental Appropriateness and Academic Focus

Recent years have witnessed increased attention to developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education. Because the approach taken in kindergarten may affect the continuity of children's experience, we asked schools to rate 21 items on the degree to which they characterize the kindergarten program (see pp. 9-10 on the school survey in Appendix E). Eleven of these statements describe practices generally characterized as developmentally appropriate or child initiated, such as the use of learning centers, small group projects, free-play activities, and child selection of own learning activities. The items were derived from the guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Bredekamp, 1987). Ten items describe practices that are generally seen as academic or teacher directed. These include daily use of workbooks, regular testing, grading, and large-group instruction.

We recognize that a mail-in survey cannot tell us what is actually going on in classrooms. (Our site visits, as noted in Chapter IV, did include classroom observations.) These self-reports about classroom practices, however, give information about the relative focus of kindergarten programs.

Beginning with the assumption (summarized in Chapter I) that developmental approaches contrast with academic, we expected that practices described in these 21 statements would represent the poles of a continuum running from highly developmentally appropriate to highly academic, and that the ratings could thus be combined into one score representing each kindergarten's approach. We thought that if a program scored higher on the developmental items, it would score lower on the academic items, and vice versa. Instead, we found that many programs rate themselves high in both types of activities. Factor analysis shows two factors, meaning that there really are two independent dimensions -- the first we have labeled developmental and the second academic. Table II-2 lists the items that the factor analysis shows belonging to each dimension, along with the mean rating given to each statement. (The statistical results of the factor analysis are given in Appendix F.)

This analysis indicates that, in kindergarten, certain academic practices co-exist alongside developmentally appropriate practice. Schools apparently see the use of academic practices, such as worksheets and basal readers, as compatible with, or supplementary to, developmental approaches, such as learning centers and manipulatives.

Table II-2: ***Mean Ratings on Items Describing Kindergarten Programs (School Survey Item B13)***

Factor 1: Developmental Practices	**Mean Rating**
books read to children daily	4.8
creative activities part of curriculum	4.8
time for free play daily	4.6
opportunities for small-group projects	4.6
blocks and manipulatives used for math	4.6
indoor and outdoor play allowed daily	4.4
number of learning centers in class	4.4
children involved in establishing rules	3.8
children dictate or write several times per week	3.7
children evaluate own work	3.6
children select own learning activities	3.1

Factor 2: Academic Practices	**Mean Rating**
learning activities primarily determined by teacher	3.8
curriculum divided into separate subjects	3.6
daily worksheets used for skill practice	3.4
children quiet in class	3.2
primarily large-group arrangements	3.0
children expected to achieve same academic skills	2.8
basal reader focus for reading	2.7
children tested regularly	2.6
all children expected to know how to read	2.0
grades used as motivators	1.8

Scale format for Item B13:

	Not at all true for this school		Somewhat true for this school		Definitely true for this school
Item	1	2	3	4	5

The mean score on items of the developmental factor is 4.21, indicating that most schools agree rather strongly with most of these statements. The mean score on the academic items, though, is 2.88, showing that these items are only somewhat true for these schools, on the average. The rather weak negative correlation (r = -.19) between the developmental summary score and the academic summary score indicates that a high score on the developmental items does not necessarily mean a low score on the academic items, or vice versa.

Ratings on the developmental factor are jointly affected by school poverty and size, but generally, low-poverty and large schools have higher mean ratings on the developmental factor. (The complexity of this interaction is seen in the fact that the highest developmental factor rating is found for moderate-poverty large schools [4.33] and the lowest is for moderate-poverty small schools [4.07].) The effects of poverty and size on the academic factor are clearer: High-poverty schools (3.10) and small schools (2.98) have the highest academic ratings.

From the mean ratings of each item (displayed in Table II-2) we see seven practices that are the most important contributions to developmentally appropriate practice in our kindergartens. The seven practices with average ratings greater than 4 focus on reading to children daily (4.79), creative activities as an important part of the curriculum (4.78), providing daily time for free play (4.62), providing opportunities for children to work together in small-group projects (4.59), blocks and manipulatives as part of math learning (4.58), providing daily time for indoor and outdoor play (4.42), and providing learning centers in each classroom (4.38).

Ratings on the four remaining developmental items fall between 3 and 4; they focus on the role of children in helping to establish rules (3.75), selecting their own learning activities (3.09), and evaluating their own work (3.56), as well as dictating or writing about their experiences several times a week (3.68).

The items of the academic factor are generally seen as less true (have lower ratings) for the responding schools than the developmental items. The statement with the highest rating for this factor is that learning activities are determined primarily by the teacher (3.84). Relatively high ratings are also given to having the curriculum divided into separate subjects (3.57) and using daily worksheets (3.42). Schools also tend to agree, moderately, that children are quiet during class time (3.15) and are taught primarily in large-group arrangements (2.97). Statements that schools find to be less than "somewhat true" involve the use of basal readers as the focus of reading instruction (2.65), regular testing in each subject (2.60), and the use of grades as important motivators (1.80). Schools also give lower ratings to the notions that all children are expected to achieve the same academic skills (2.78) or be able to read (2.02) by the end of kindergarten.

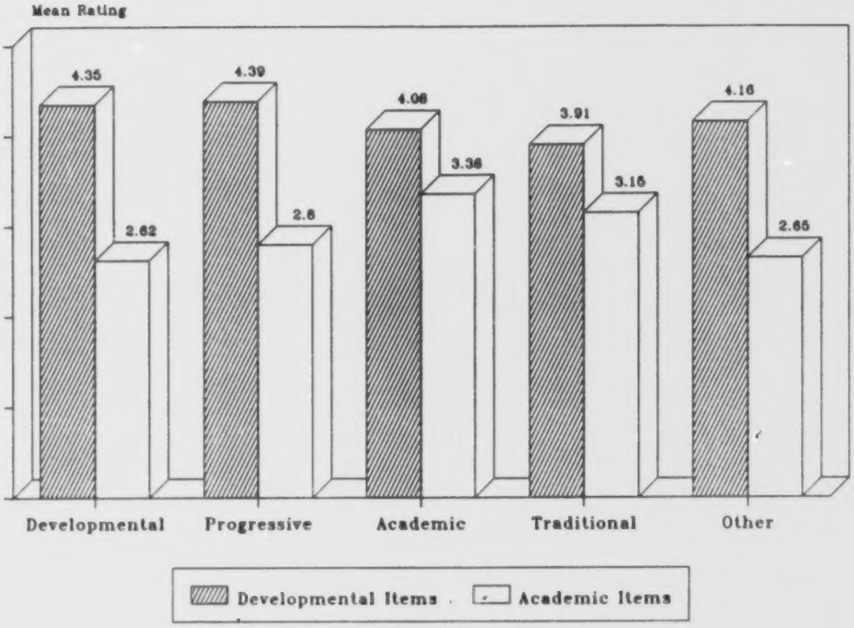
As mentioned earlier, these items were constructed by referring to examples of developmentally appropriate and inappropriate practices provided by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Bredekamp, 1987). The findings suggest that the concept of developmentally appropriate practice as defined by NAEYC is unevenly implemented in U.S. kindergartens. Although respondents generally seem to prefer activities we describe as developmental, they appear to combine daily worksheets, for example, along with concrete manipulatives for learning activities, while having the learning activities primarily determined by the teacher. Furthermore, one of the major hallmarks of developmentally appropriate practice, allowing children to select their own learning activities, receives the lowest rating of all the developmental descriptors.

Kindergarten teachers may be philosophically in agreement with a developmental approach, but because of pressure from first grade teachers for a given standard of achievement, testing requirements at first grade, or parental expectations for academic programming, they may not adopt developmentally appropriate practices wholeheartedly. In one site we visited, the kindergarten teacher is committed to a developmental approach, but feels pressure to be more academic. Her solution is to mix developmental activities with traditional teacher-directed seatwork. She explained, "It's hard for me. I can't control the centers. My head is up here, my heart is over there. I can only change one step at a time." We also see a blending of the two approaches occurring over time. In two of our sites, where first grade is highly academic, kindergarten teachers begin the year developmentally but become increasingly academic as the school year progresses, as their way of helping promote the transition into first grade.

When schools were asked what label they would use to characterize their kindergarten programs, "developmental" was by far the most common choice, selected by 44% of the schools. "Traditional" (19%) and "academic" (16%) were the second and third most common choices. "Progressive" was chosen by 8% of the schools, and 5% said "other."

As seen in Figure II-11, schools that label themselves "developmental" or "progressive" give much higher ratings to the items on the developmental factor than to the items on the academic factor. In contrast, schools that label themselves "academic" or "traditional" give much more similar ratings to the developmental and the academic items. Even the academic and traditional kindergartens, however, give higher mean ratings to the developmental items than to the academic items.

Figure II-11: ***Mean Ratings on Developmental and Academic Factors by Schools Considering Themselves Academic, Traditional, Developmental, or Progressive***



While it appears as though many schools combine academic and developmental approaches and activities in their kindergarten program, the relative focus differs according to the poverty level of the school. In Table II-3, mean ratings on the developmental and academic items are compared across the three poverty levels. On the developmental items, only three show a significant effect of poverty. The differences are due primarily to low-poverty schools having higher ratings on the use of blocks and other manipulatives, small group projects, and learning centers than higher-poverty schools.

The situation is quite different when we look at the academic items. Significant differences exist in all items except the degree to which teachers determine activities. Children in high-poverty schools are more likely to attend kindergarten programs where they use basal readers, are expected to be quiet, have separate subjects, large groups, regular tests, grades, and daily worksheets. Expectations for children in these classes to read and to achieve the same level of skill development are also different than those held for children in lower-poverty schools. Although the differences among the ratings are small, the direction of the differences is highly consistent and represents a clear pattern that differentiates the kindergarten classroom environments of high- and low-poverty level schools.

Table II-3: ***Effect of School Poverty Level on Kindergarten Program Ratings***

Academic Items	Poverty Level			Significance
	High	Moderate	Low	
Basal reader	2.9	2.7	2.5	*
Quiet	3.3	3.2	3.1	*
Separate subjects	3.8	3.6	3.4	***
Large groups	3.0	3.1	2.9	*
Tested regularly	2.8	2.6	2.5	**
Grades motivators	2.2	1.8	1.6	***
Teacher determines activities	3.8	3.9	3.8	n.s.
Daily worksheets	3.8	3.4	3.3	***
Achieve same skills	3.3	2.8	2.5	***
All should read	2.3	2.0	1.9	***
Academic Factor	3.1	2.9	2.7	***
Developmental Items	**Poverty Level**			**Significance**
	High	**Moderate**	**Low**	
Small group projects	4.7	4.5	4.6	**
Learning centers	4.3	4.3	4.5	*
Free play daily	4.6	4.6	4.6	n.s.
Evaluate own work	3.5	3.5	3.6	n.s.
Dictate or write	3.7	3.6	3.8	n.s.
Blocks/manipulatives	4.6	4.5	4.7	**
Children involved in rules	3.7	3.8	3.8	n.s.
Children select activities	3.0	3.1	3.2	n.s.
In/outdoor play daily	4.5	4.4	4.4	n.s.
Creative activities	4.8	4.8	4.8	n.s.
Books read daily	4.8	4.8	4.8	n.s.
Developmental Factor	4.2	4.2	4.3	*

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

School Characteristics: Parent Involvement and Climate

While children's experiences in kindergarten may be most directly affected by the immediate features of the classroom, characteristics of the school extending beyond the kindergarten classroom may indirectly affect children through their teachers and parents. Two sets of such characteristics that are likely to facilitate or hinder children's adjustment to kindergarten were examined in the surveys -- parent involvement and school climate. As with classroom-level features, school influences are also affected by poverty level and school size.

Parent Involvement Activities

We asked schools to report on the number and types of opportunities they make available for parents of kindergarten children to become involved in their children's education. We did not ask for the actual participation rates of parents in these activities. The school survey listed eight possible activities. On average, schools provide 4.4 activities. Only 1% of schools offer only one or no activities, with 7% offering two, 18% offering three, 28% offering four, 24% offering five, and 22% offering six or more.

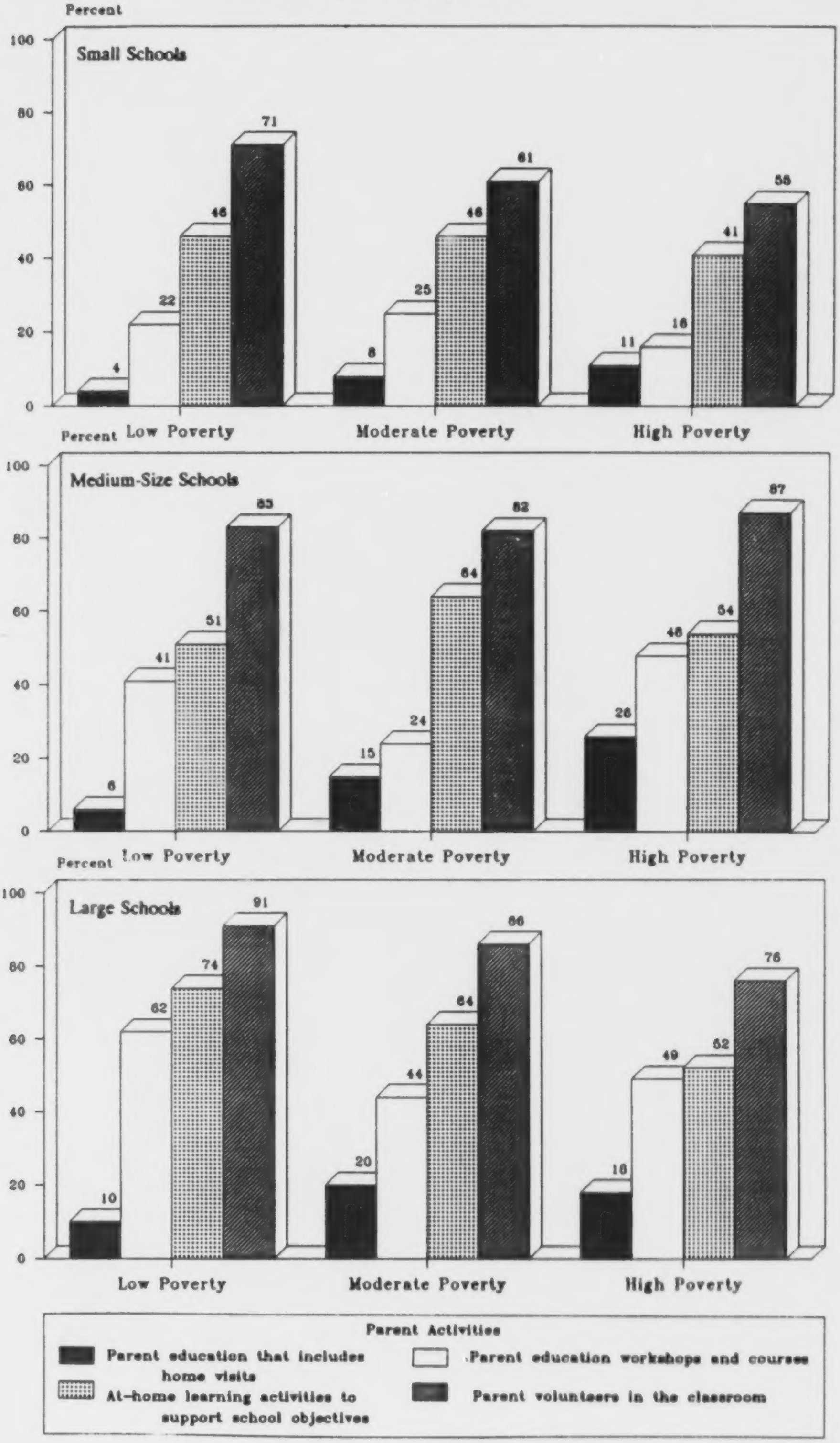
Figure II-12 compares schools of different sizes and poverty levels on four important types of parent involvement:

- parent education that includes home visits
- parent education workshops and courses
- at-home learning activities to support school objectives
- parent volunteers in the classroom

Overall, 78% of the schools provide opportunities for parents to volunteer in the classroom. Fifty-six percent of schools report providing learning activities for parents to do with their children at home. Fewer schools (37%) report providing parent education workshops or providing parent education that includes home visits (12%). Opportunities for parents to serve on school committees are reported by half (50%) of schools, and "other" types of parent involvement activities are reported by 9% of the schools.

Opportunities for parents to become involved in school and at home in learning activities with their children exist for all parents. The one area in which more opportunity exists for parents in high-poverty schools is in the area of parent education with home visits. This may occur because high-poverty schools are more likely to include federal or state programs that support home-school connections and recognize that home visits are a way to reach parents who are not comfortable coming to the school.

Figure II-12: ***Prevalence of Four Types of Parent Involvement Activities by School Size and Poverty Level***



The interaction of school size and poverty level creates dramatic differences in parent involvement opportunities: large, low-poverty schools report greater opportunity for parent volunteers, at-home learning, and parent education workshops than do small high-poverty schools. Parent education with home visits is more common in large, high-poverty schools, suggesting perhaps that personnel are more readily available for such activities in urban rather than rural high-poverty areas, that home visits are more difficult to make in rural areas, or that home visits are seen as less necessary in smaller communities.

When we compare kindergarten and preschool parent involvement in just those schools that have preschools, it appears that parent involvement is conceptualized differently at the two levels. More schools provide parent education workshops and parent education with home visits for preschool parents than for kindergarten, and fewer have teacher conferences at the preschool level.

Barriers to parental participation exist in all schools we visited, although rural and urban schools seem to develop different strategies for working with parents. In one of our rural schools, it is not uncommon for parents to live many miles from the school and to be without telephones. Transportation is a serious barrier to getting parents into the school to volunteer or participate in school functions. Teachers and administrators frequently traveled to homes in order to communicate with parents. While not formal home visits in the sense of being part of a parent education program, these trips were seen by staff as necessary to building trust in the school. In one of the urban magnet schools, where parent involvement in school-based activities is expected, transportation is also a barrier. In this situation, however, parents are given vouchers for public transportation. In another urban school, personnel work closely with social service agencies to support parents' active involvement in schools.

School Climate

The concept of school climate has emerged from the effective schools literature as an important factor in school effectiveness (e.g., Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979). The key characteristics of a productive climate include collegial relationships, sense of community, high expectations that are commonly shared, and order and discipline (Purkey & Smith, 1982). In designing the survey for the transition study, we focused on the aspects of school climate that deal with staff expectations for student achievement, the relationship among staff, and sense of community (see items 32-42 on p. E-18 of the school survey in Appendix E), facets we thought might influence the nature of the transition children experience when entering the school.

Factor analysis of these eleven items indicates that there are two facets of climate (shown in Table II-4). The items of the first factor seem to describe attitudes toward parents and children, which include school staff expectations for student achievement. This factor suggests a broader aspect of school climate, which includes communication with parents and relationships among staff that may relate to the sense of community in the school. The fact that these items combine on the first factor demonstrates that expectations for student achievement go along with communication among staff and between teachers and parents. Better levels of communication are accompanied by more positive expectations for children.

The second factor includes three items that reflect the value respondents place on early childhood education. This is probably related to expectations for student success in school since a school that values early childhood programs is more likely to expect that they have a positive influence on later achievement.

We found that the ratings on both school climate factors differ depending on the characteristics of the schools. Ratings on the first factor depend on the poverty level of the school. High-poverty schools are less positive than lower-poverty schools in attitudes toward children's future achievement, parent-teacher relationships, and teacher-teacher relationships. The means of the ratings on this factor are 1.77 for low-poverty schools, 2.00 for moderate-poverty schools, and 2.22 for high-poverty schools, the higher ratings indicating greater disagreement with the positively worded attitudes.

The value respondents place on early childhood education is equal across school poverty levels, but differs by size. Medium-size schools (1.79) and large schools (1.87) have a more positive climate than small schools (2.06) with respect to valuing preschool and kindergarten for children's future success, particularly for disadvantaged children.

Table II-4: Mean Ratings of Items Describing School Climate (School Survey Items C32-C42)

Factor 1: Attitudes Toward Parents and Children	**Mean Rating**
Teachers work together.	1.5
Most children will graduate.	1.7
Teachers can communicate with parents.	1.9
Almost all children can master grade level skills.	2.0
School is site of community activities.	2.1
Low-income children can achieve at same level as others.	2.1
Parents our encouraged to participate.	2.5
Most parents do not participate.	4.1
Factor 2: Appreciation of Early Childhood Education	**Mean Rating**
Kindergarten is essential for success.	1.5
Disadvantaged children with preschool will do better.	1.8
Preschool is essential for success.	2.4

Scale format for Items C32-C42:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Item	1	2	3	4	5

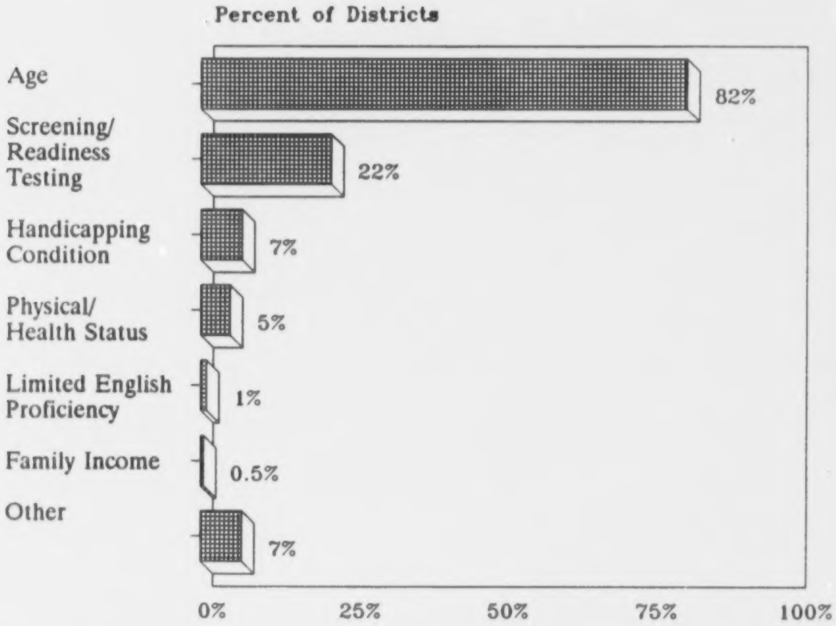
District and School Policies and Practices

District policies often guide decisions regarding the administration and use of standardized testing and criteria for kindergarten enrollment. While children may be unaware of such policies and practices in their daily life, these decisions may be important influences in how adjustment problems are viewed and addressed. As with school-level influences, decisions made at the district level also affect children's adjustment to kindergarten, as depicted in Figure II-1 at the beginning of this chapter.

Kindergarten Entry Criteria

Policies on kindergarten entry have potential for influencing the nature and degree of children's adjustment to kindergarten. In more than four out of five districts (82%), all children who meet the age cut-off are considered eligible for kindergarten; there are no other restrictions. In fact, of the six possible entry criteria listed on the survey, only "screening or readiness testing" is used by more than a tenth of all districts, and it is used by 22%. (A few districts report having no restrictions other than age but also indicate using screening or readiness testing.) The percentages of districts using each of the kindergarten entry criteria are shown in Figure II-13.

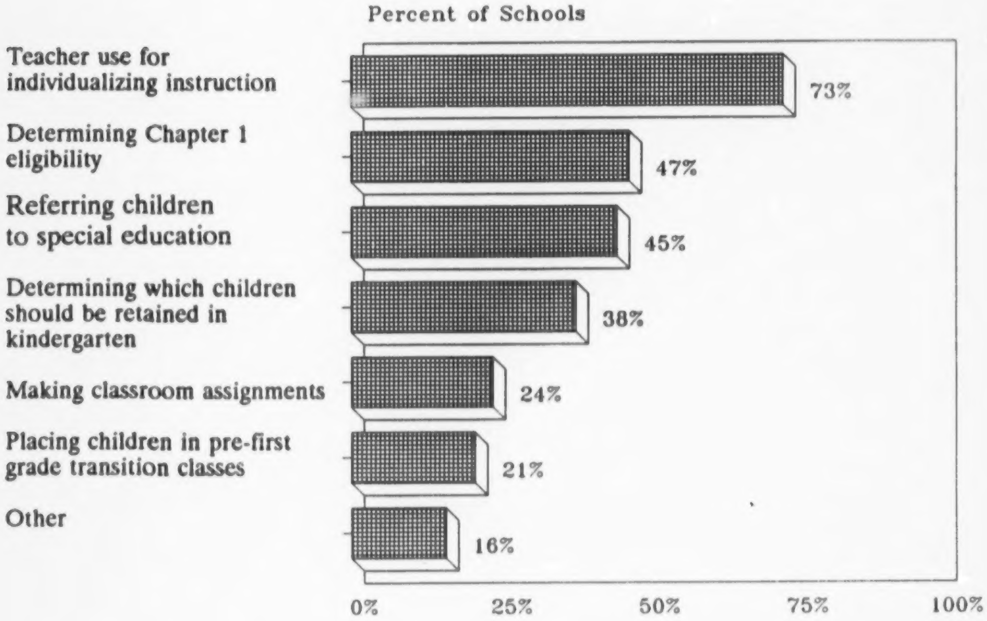
Figure II-13: *Percentages of Districts With Various Kindergarten Entry Criteria*



Kindergarten Assessment

Survey results confirm that assessment of various kinds is widespread in America's kindergartens. More than four-fifths of schools (82%) report that kindergarten children are routinely assessed with standardized tests, screening, or readiness instruments. High-poverty (86%) and low-poverty (84%) schools use such assessments more than moderate-poverty schools (77%). The percentages of schools using these assessments for different purposes are shown in Figure II-14.

Figure II-14: ***Frequency of Assessment with Standardized Tests, Screening, or Readiness Instruments***

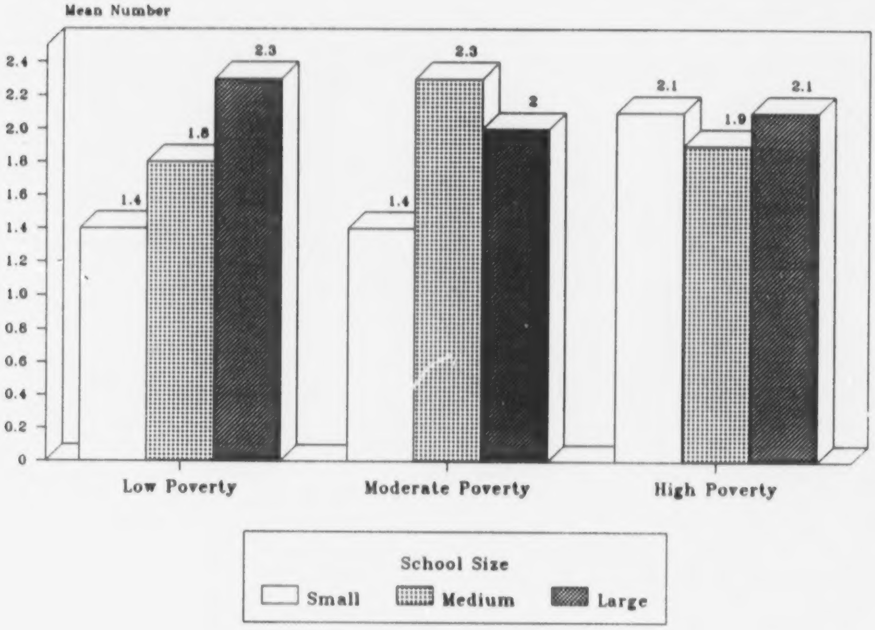


Parent Involvement in Policies and Operations

Going beyond parent activities that more directly relate to children's experience, as described earlier, we wanted to investigate the involvement of parents at the policy level. We asked schools to check any of 12 areas of school operation and policy in which parents of kindergarten children participate. (These are listed on p. E-8 of the school survey, item 12.) At both the district and school levels, it is relatively rare for parents to participate in policies and operations related to teacher evaluation, staff hiring, budget decisions, selecting their child's teacher, and choosing the school their child will attend. About one-third of schools report that parents participate in parent involvement policies, setting school goals, and long-range school planning.

When we look at the number of parent involvement areas checked, we see that they are concentrated in one-third of the schools. Only 33% of schools checked three or more areas, and 28% checked none of them. The number of areas parents participate in increases with the size of the school, but the school poverty level moderates this effect (see Figure II-15). In low-poverty schools, larger schools have a greater number of areas of parent participation. In moderate-poverty schools, however, medium-sized schools have slightly more areas of participation than large schools, while in high-poverty schools, size has little effect. Although it is not clear why this pattern appears, opportunities for parents to get involved in policies may be a function of leadership styles that differ by size, or of the presence of federal programs mandating parental participation in policymaking.

Figure II-15: ***Mean Number of Areas Involving School Policy and Operations in Which Kindergarten Parents Participate by School Size and Poverty Level***



In the district survey we asked about the existence of policies that allow "parents of kindergarten students to have direct parent participation" in such areas as hiring staff, teacher evaluation policies, and budget decisions. More than a quarter of the districts (28%) do not have any policies allowing this kind of parent involvement. It is not surprising, then, to find 28% of the schools saying that there are no areas of school operation and policy in which parents participate. The major differences between district and school-level findings on parent involvement are that participation in policies on retaining kindergarten children and in developing parent grievance procedures and policies are more likely to occur at the district level.

Three specific areas of district policy related to parent involvement are related to poverty level or school size. The following lists the percentage of districts in which there are policies allowing parents of kindergarten children to have direct participation:

- Contributing to policies on kindergarten retention:
    25% of high-poverty districts
    23% of moderate-poverty districts
    15% of low-poverty districts

- Developing grievance procedures and policies:
    27% of high-poverty districts
    21% of moderate-poverty districts
    15% of low-poverty districts

- Choosing their child's school:
    25% of large districts
    7% of medium-sized districts
    9% of small districts

This pattern parallels the school-level findings: There is a clear pattern of the high-poverty or large districts being more likely to allow the participation of parents in certain types of policymaking.

Summary

Information from the school and district surveys gives a full picture of the characteristics and practices in the nation's kindergartens. The characteristics and practices reported for prekindergarten programs only describe preschool programs in the 27% of schools that house them. We have no data on preschool programs operating outside the public schools.

Prekindergarten Experience

Overall, 40% of incoming kindergarten children are estimated to have had some type of formal prekindergarten experience. About one-quarter of schools have prekindergarten programs, and they have existed an average of six years. Most of the prekindergarten programs in schools are state or locally funded programs with age as the primary eligibility criterion. Most of these prekindergarten programs formally assess children with standardized achievement or readiness tests. Almost all of the programs provide opportunities for parents to become involved in the program.

Adjustment Difficulties

The average school reports that less than 10% of incoming kindergartners have difficulty adjusting to kindergarten. High-poverty schools report higher percentages of children experiencing adjustment difficulties. The area of greatest difficulty is seen as adjusting to the academic demands of kindergarten, with adjusting to new behavioral expectations and to the length of the school day seen as the next most troublesome areas.

High-poverty schools report higher percentages of children having difficulty adjusting to the academic demands of kindergarten; in fact, in comparison with low-poverty schools, five times as many high-poverty schools (33%) report high levels of children with difficulty meeting the academic demands of kindergarten. High-poverty schools also rate themselves higher on academic activities in kindergarten classrooms.

Kindergarten Classrooms

At the kindergarten level, more than half the children attend half-day programs with staff-child ratios averaging 1:16. Age is the most common criterion for kindergarten entry. A very high percentage of schools (82%) routinely test kindergarten children. Almost all offer some activities for parent involvement. While most programs call themselves developmental, closer analysis of their reported activities suggests that the average kindergarten classroom blends academic activities, such as worksheets, with more child-initiated developmental approaches.

Extra-Year Programs

Approximately one-fifth of all schools have extra-year classes for children prior to their kindergarten year. Being retained in kindergarten or being placed in an extra-year class may be a consequence of not being able to adjust to the demands of kindergarten. More than half (61%) of the schools routinely retain kindergarten children, retaining on average 5.3% of the children. One-fourth of schools have transition classes for children between kindergarten and first grade; approximately 13% of the kindergarten children in those schools go into transition classes. In total, 72% of public schools either retain children in kindergarten, place them in transitional classes, or do both.

Children have very different experiences in preschool and kindergarten, depending on their school's size and poverty level. The following summarizes these differences.

Effect of District and School Poverty Levels

The most pervasive finding from these analyses is the impact that district or school poverty level has on so many school activities. The influence of poverty level is so dramatic that one cannot begin to think about the continuity experiences in school without taking it into account.

The following features are all more likely to be the case in schools with higher proportions of students from low-income families:

- assessment of preschoolers at entry using standardized tests, screening, or readiness instruments;
- preschool program located in the school, especially one that is Head Start, Chapter 1, or local/state sponsored;
- provision of parent involvement opportunities for parents of preschoolers in school-based programs;
- greater difficulty perceived in adjusting to kindergarten;
- full school-day kindergartens (rather than half-day);
- favorable staff/child ratios in kindergarten;
- greater academic focus to kindergarten classroom activities;
- school-sponsored parent education with home visits;
- kindergarten parents contributing to school policies on retention and grievance procedures;
- retention of more children in kindergarten in those schools that retain;
- assignment of children to extra-year transition classes; and
- less positive school climate in terms of activities toward parents and children.

It is less likely that higher-poverty schools:

- have readiness classes; and
- require parental consent for placing children in transition classes.

Schools with lower levels of poverty, on the other hand, share certain features:

- a higher percentage of children enrolled in preschool or other prekindergarten programs before kindergarten;
- more parent volunteers in classrooms; and
- more parent education workshops offered.

Effect of School Size

Small schools (i.e., fewer than 300 students) are less likely than larger schools to:

- have prekindergarten programs, including Chapter 1 and district-administered Head Start, located in the school, but more likely to value preschool and kindergarten for children's future success;
- report that children have greater difficulty adjusting to kindergarten;
- allow parents to choose their child's school;
- retain children in kindergarten (but retain higher percentages);
- have transition classes (but with larger percentage of children enrolled in them);
- have full-day kindergartens;
- provide opportunities for preschool and kindergarten parents to be involved in parent education workshops, at-home learning activities, volunteering in the classrooms, and parent education that includes home visits; and
- have kindergarten parents involved in multiple areas related to school policy.

Small schools are more likely to:

- have favorable staff/child ratios in kindergarten; and
- have an academic focus in their kindergarten activities.

CHAPTER III: TRANSITION ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS

Introduction
Extent of School Transition Activities
Connecting With Preschools
Welcoming Children and Parents
The Local Educational Context
Continuity Beyond Kindergarten
Summary

III. TRANSITION ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS

Introduction

Focus of Chapter

This chapter focuses on the types of transition activities being carried out by public schools. Because the site visits provided rich detail on the nature and extent of these activities (far beyond what is reported in the surveys), we include extensive illustrations (set off in boxes) from these eight schools to augment the survey findings.

The purpose of presenting indepth findings from the site visits is to provide richer illustrations of activities, events, and circumstances related to transition. It should be kept in mind, however, that the sites were not selected to be representative (see Chapter I). All but one of the local sites fall within the high-poverty category used for classifying survey respondents (i.e., 50% or more of the students eligible for free or reduced price lunch), and the exception has 40% eligible (i.e., the school enrolls students with a moderate poverty level). Nevertheless, because they show what is happening in a few places, they also show what is possible in many. Because the sites represent diverse situations, they help us understand the circumstances in which teachers, parents, and administrators are working to create continuity for children. And although we cannot use site visit data to generalize to all schools, when there is congruence with survey findings, we have greater confidence in the indepth analyses.

For more information on each of the sites visited, readers can refer to Appendix B. For each site there is a brief writeup that describes the characteristics of the community and school district in which the school is located, the relationship with preschools, the structure of the school's transition activities, and a summary of the key features of the site.

Highlights of Findings

There are five major findings, which are highlighted here and discussed in detail in this chapter:

- Only 21% of districts report a "wide range" of transition activities.
- The two key elements of transition in schools are (a) coordination and communication between the kindergarten and any prekindergarten programs the children come from, and (b) parent involvement in transition.
- Coordination and communication appear to be more extensive in schools serving higher proportions of low-income children (the high-poverty schools), whereas transition activities that involve parents are more common in low-poverty schools.

- Only 13% of schools have a formal written policy related to transition and continuity, and these are more common in high-poverty schools.
- Four-fifths of all schools report K-3 transition activities, with the most common type of across-grade articulation being the transfer of student information and the presence of coordinated curriculum and instructional strategies.

Plan for Chapter

The chapter begins with an analysis of the extent to which survey respondents indicated that a range of transition activities takes place at their school. Subsequent sections of the chapter focus on specific areas of transition: coordination and communication between preschools and kindergartens, activities to welcome children and parents into the schools, policies and other aspects of the local educational context, and continuity beyond kindergarten. Our analysis of factors that may be influencing the extent of transition activities in schools appears in Chapter IV.

Extent of School Transition Activities

The extent to which transition activities occur varies considerably, but overall, the national surveys suggest that transition activities are not very prevalent and consist primarily of orientations for incoming kindergarten students and their parents. Almost one-third (31%) of districts report no organized transition activities at all. For the two-thirds of districts that have transition activities, they are not widespread even within the district. More than three-fourths of the districts (79%) say "there are a few transition activities." Only 21% say there is a "wide range" of activities.

Large districts are far more likely to report having transition activities than small districts, with 84% of the large and 60% of the small districts having activities. (There is no significant effect of poverty on this overall district finding.)

Factor Analysis of School Survey Items

To learn about specific activities conducted by schools to provide for a smoother transition into kindergarten, we included eleven items on the school survey that describe sets of activities or conditions related to transition and continuity at the school. We asked respondents to indicate the extent to which each activity or circumstance exists at their school. (The items appear on pp. E-12 to E-16 of Appendix E.)

Nine items (C12-C20) asked respondents to indicate the extent and nature of their transition activities on a 5-point scale as illustrated below (see Table III-1):

15. Development of a curriculum coordinated with children's prekindergarten programs:

1	2	3	4	5
The kindergarten curriculum has been developed independent of prekindergarten curricula.		Some features of the kindergarten curriculum are coordinated with prekindergarten curricula.	The kindergarten curriculum has been specifically designed to build on prekindergarten curricula.	

The two items marked with "NA" in Table III-1 used a different format. Item C21 asked respondents to estimate the percentage of prekindergarten program staff who participate in five sets of activities related to transition. The variable analyzed was the average percentage rating for the five activities. Item C26 had a similar structure. The variable analyzed was a summary variable representing involvement of entering kindergartners' parents in at-home activities, providing information to the teacher, attending orientation visits, and attending parent-teacher conferences before the start of school.

Factor analysis of these eleven items revealed two distinct types of transition activities, which we interpret as "coordination and communication" and "parent involvement in transition." The items that make up each factor are listed in Table III-1 along with their mean ratings.

Table III-1: ***Mean Ratings on Survey Items Assessing School Transition Activities***

Factor 1: Coordination/Communication	**Mean Rating**
Transfer of records to kindergarten teachers (C12)	3.40
Formality of school policy on continuity activities (C20)	2.83
Communication between kindergarten teachers and previous caregivers about students (C13)	2.80
Communication between kindergarten teachers and previous caregivers about curriculum (C14)	2.71
Development of a curriculum coordinated with prekindergarten programs (C15)	2.25
Extent of participation of preschool or daycare staff in continuity activities (C21)	NA
Factor 2: Parent Involvement in Transition	**Mean Rating**
Formality of arrangements for visits by parents of entering kindergarten students (C17)	4.07
Informing parents of entering kindergarten students of their rights and responsibilities (C18)	3.89
Parent involvement in classroom activities to smooth transition (C19)	3.78
Prevalence of school visits by parents of entering kindergarten students (C16)	3.75
Percentage of parents of entering kindergarten students involved in continuity activities (C26)	NA

The first factor contains items that describe preschool-school communication and coordination. They involve activities that require substantial organization and planning and tend to be ongoing. As one item specifically indicates, these are more likely to result from policy-level decisions. The second factor, on the other hand, comprises activities, such as school visits, that are shorter term and perhaps more easily implemented; they all involve parents in one way or another.

We assessed the overall effect of school size and poverty level on transition activities by conducting analysis of variance on the mean rating of the five coordination/communication items (C12-C20). This showed a significant school-size-by-poverty interaction such that the highest ratings are in high-poverty small schools. In contrast, the analysis of variance on the average of the four items reflecting extent of parent involvement in transition found that the highest levels of parent involvement are reported in low-poverty schools. (This is in apparent contrast to the finding reported in Chapter II that high-poverty schools provide more parent involvement opportunities in other types of school activities.)

We can only hypothesize about the reasons for these findings. The coordination/communication items require considerable effort by a number of people in order to achieve a truly coordinated curriculum, or to maintain meaningful communication between teachers in the kindergartens and all the prekindergarten programs that send children to school. It may be easier to accomplish these in small schools; and in high-poverty schools there may be special efforts because of federal programs. In contrast, the transition activities that involve parents are more easily accomplished.

In this chapter we focus our attention on describing the types of transition activities we learned about and how much they occur. In Chapter IV, we will explore reasons for why these patterns exist.

Connecting With Preschools

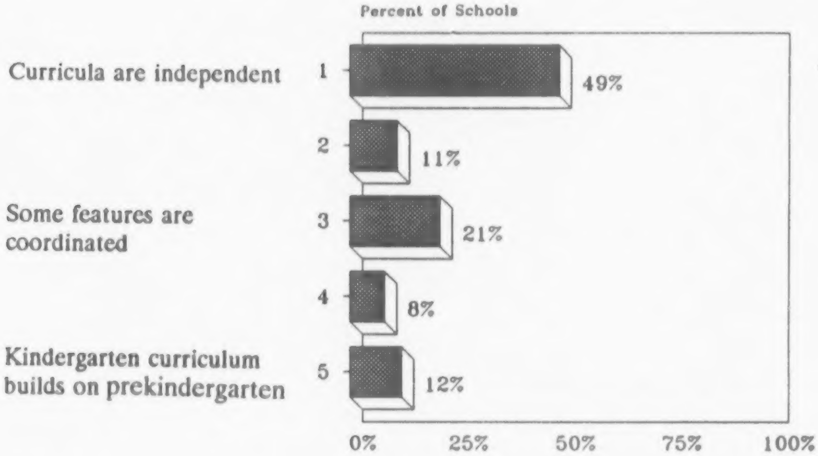
Establishing connections between kindergartens and the preschool programs that send children to the kindergartens characterizes four of the transition activities reported on the school survey: coordination of curriculum, communication, sharing of information, and shared training and staff orientations.

Coordination of Curriculum

The existence of a coordinated curriculum between preschool and kindergarten has the potential for mediating continuity of children's experience. In the school survey respondents reported the extent to which the kindergarten curriculum is coordinated with that of preschool programs. Figure III-1 shows the percentage of schools giving each response. Almost half report that the two curricula are independent of one another; only 12% clearly build their kindergarten curriculum on the preschool program.

The mean rating on this item across all schools is 2.2 (the lowest rating of any of the nine aspects of continuity). Although there is a complex interaction of school size and poverty, more of the large, high-poverty schools appear to have coordinated preschool and kindergarten curricula (mean rating = 2.63) than any of the other groups (medium-size, moderate-poverty schools have the lowest rating, 1.80).

Figure III-1: ***Extent to Which Schools Have Developed a Kindergarten Curriculum Coordinated With Children's Prekindergarten Programs***



With one exception among the sites visited, all those that house an onsite preschool have a coordinated curriculum. Five sites have integrated or coordinated curricula between at least preschool and kindergarten; Seaview Magnet's curriculum carries throughout its prekindergarten to grade 6 program, Westside School's kindergarten through third grade, and Southside's from prekindergarten to grade 2.

Hillside has instituted a language-based program, K-TALK, at both levels and plans to expand the curriculum up to grade 3 under a new state grant. Southside and Pioneer Valley both use the High/Scope curriculum at prekindergarten and kindergarten. The British Infant Schools model is used throughout the grades in the Seaview Magnet School.

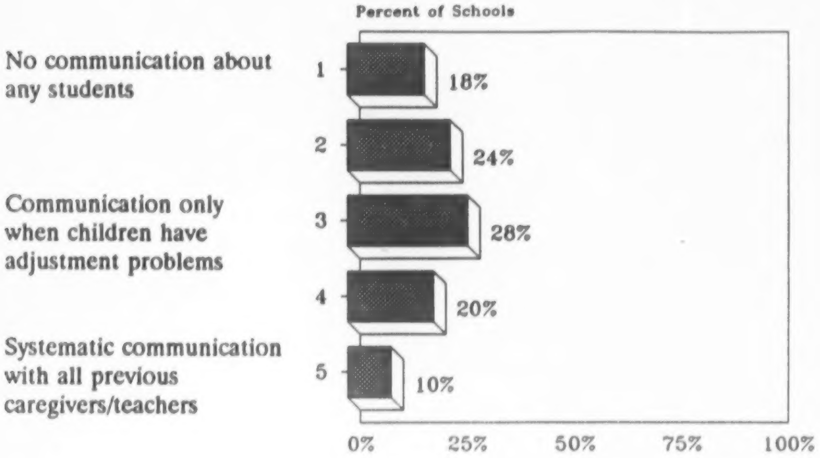
In Bear Valley School, which does not have preschool and kindergarten programs together in the same location, each program has independently adopted a developmental approach to early education. Little communication exists between the programs and yet pedagogical continuity for children is fairly high. Thus, it is possible for continuity of curriculum to exist without co-location or intentional coordination.

Communication About Students

Communication would seem to be essential to coordination and continuity. Based on two survey questions, however, we must conclude that there is only limited communication between the kindergarten and preschool levels (and we only asked about communication related to fairly important issues -- the children and the curriculum). The first item reports the extent of communication between kindergarten teachers and previous caregivers or teachers about entering students. Figure III-2 shows the percentage of schools reporting varying levels of such communication. The modal approach seems to be to communicate only under special circumstances; only 10% of schools report systematic communication with all previous caregivers.

The mean rating for all schools is 2.8, meaning that on average there is only some communication under special circumstances. There is a complex interaction of school size and poverty level, with the greatest degree of communication reported in both the small and large high-poverty schools. Even their average ratings are only 3.1 and 3.0, respectively, however.

Figure III-2: ***Extent to Which Schools Report Communication Between Kindergarten Teachers and Previous Caregivers/Teachers About Entering Students***

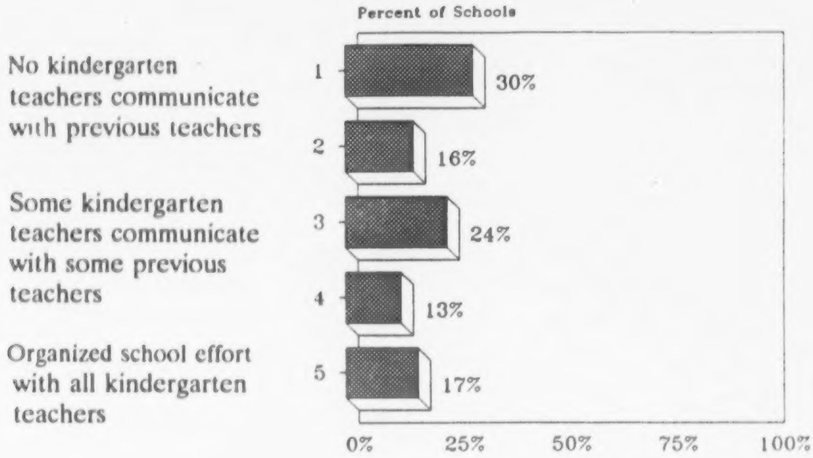


Communication About Curriculum

The other communication item asked for ratings on the extent of communication between kindergarten teachers and entering students' caregivers or teachers about curriculum issues. There is, overall, less communication about curriculum than about individual students, with fully 30% of schools reporting that no kindergarten teachers communicate about curriculum issues.

The mean overall rating is 2.7, with again a complex school-size-by-poverty interaction: greater extent of communication in both the small and large high-poverty schools. Figure III-3 shows the percentage of schools reporting the various degrees of communication regarding curriculum issues.
This finding is consistent with the one reported earlier that 88% of schools do not build their kindergarten curriculum on the preschool program. If the kindergartens have a different approach than the preschools, then teachers may not see the need to communicate about curriculum.

Figure III-3: ***Extent of Communication Between Kindergarten Teachers and Previous Caregivers/Teachers About Curriculum Issues***



In three of the schools visited that have in-house preschools, communication between preschool and kindergarten staff is frequent and ongoing. Although Seaview and Southside, the two magnet schools, have little contact with prekindergarten programs outside their school, coordination within the school is highly informal but regular (e.g., planning meetings, sharing resources). Prekindergarten is involved as an integral part of the early childhood unit in which teachers from preschool to grades 2 or 3 work together as a team. At Plainview Elementary School, the new inhouse preschool staff are actively drawing the kindergarten and first grade staff into participation in preschool-sponsored activities, and the principal is encouraging joint staff development coursework for the early childhood teachers.

Common curricula or joint staff development activities do not always promote communication, however. In Pioneer, all county Head Start programs use the High/Scope curriculum, but, while this may facilitate continuity of experience for children from one program to another, it does not promote joint inservice training or frequent communication with these offsite programs.

In the site visits, we found little communication between school-based kindergartens and preschools located outside the school. For example, all communication between preschool and kindergarten staffs at Hillside is infrequent and formal. Head Start and migrant preschool personnel are dissatisfied with this level of communication and would like to institute regular meetings. There is no communication with another Head Start program in town that is administered by a community agency and located less than a mile from the school.

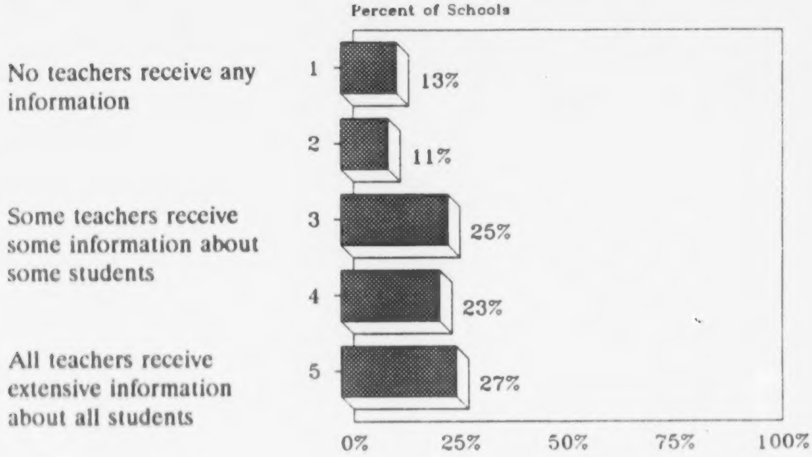
Another example is Bear Valley, where there are no formal activities promoting communication between preschool and kindergarten teachers. Discussions between the two staffs are infrequent and focused on specific students. This situation seems to be changing. The principal at Bear Valley recently recognized that former Head Start children are not the children experiencing adjustment difficulties. She then met with the Head Start director to discuss ways the school can help recruit more eligible families into the Head Start program.

The newly established network in Lakeside has opened the door for communication between preschools and kindergarten. In this instance, communication is the first step and may eventually be the driving force in creating joint inservice training opportunities and coordinated curricula. At this point, preschool and kindergarten program staff disagree about early childhood education philosophy, and these conflicts need to be resolved before other action can be effective.

Sharing of Information

We asked about the transfer of records to kindergarten teachers. Based again on a 5-point scale, Figure III-4 shows that the majority of teachers receive at least some information about some entering students. In slightly more than a quarter of schools, it is reported that all teachers receive extensive information on all entering students. The mean rating is 3.4, with small, high-poverty schools receiving the most information (3.9) and large, low-poverty schools the least (mean rating of 3.0).

Figure III-4: ***Extent to Which Kindergarten Teachers Receive Information About Entering Kindergartners***



On another item (C-21), respondents to the school survey told us that "sharing of information on an individual child's developmental progress with school staff" is one of the most common ways in which preschool program staff participate in preschool-school continuity. This also occurs more in high-poverty schools and in small schools.

In all sites visited, schools routinely receive records from at least some preschools. The most common information provided is health records, which are exchanged in all eight sites. Four schools receive special needs information about children; two send test results and progress reports. The information received by the kindergartens is used for such purposes as individualizing instruction, grouping, and special education referral or planning.

In light of this, we were surprised by how many teachers said that they do not want information about the children prior to working with them. These teachers feel strongly about forming their own opinions of children and do not want to be influenced by records. Some or all teachers in seven of the eight sites do not review records received from preschools. Perhaps the type of information found in records, or a history of the misuse of information, leads kindergarten teachers to be wary of using such information.

In Seaview, the onsite preschool sends 3 x 5 cards to the kindergarten teacher listing the academic skills of each child, behavioral information, and any concerns about the child. From preschools outside the school, only health information is received. In Southside, 3 x 5 cards are also sent from the inhouse preschool, listing each child's writing level, math level, and teacher comment. Interest in this information sharing in both Seaview and Southside may be related to the fact that both principals are former early childhood teachers. Two other sites report that except for health information, no procedure exists for routinely transferring information, but that it can be obtained on specific children by special request.

Shared Training and Staff Orientations

The surveys asked about the extent to which staff from local prekindergarten programs participate in joint workshops with school staff on curriculum, child development issues, etc. Three-fourths of the schools report that less than 25% of preschool staff participate in such activities, although high-poverty schools report higher participation levels than low- or moderate-poverty schools. The site visits show that more of this type of coordination is possible.

Shared Training

In the five sites with coordinated curricula, inservice training is a shared activity. For example, in Seaview, preschool has been an integral part of the school for ten years and its teachers regularly attend inservice training with kindergarten through grade 3 teachers. In Southside and Pioneer Primary, preschool and kindergarten staff are trained together on the High/Scope curriculum. In Pioneer, prekindergarten staff are responsible for training kindergarten staff in the model, but only the preschool staff in the schools are included. Although Head Start programs also use the model, they are not involved in the joint training.

In sites with no school-based preschool, there is little in the way of shared inservice training. In some cases, preschools and schools send their inservice flyers to each other, but few teachers take the opportunity to attend inservice activities at the other site, nor are they provided with the opportunity to participate. In Plainville, there is little onsite shared training, but the district uses state grant funds to pay for preschool and kindergarten teachers to attend state and regional meetings on developmentally appropriate curricula for early childhood.

Staff Orientations

Staff orientations and visitations, another mechanism for increased preschool-school coordination, were examined in the site visits (but not the surveys). In most cases, it is the preschool staff who initiate this type of coordination. In Hillside, an informal orientation to the preschool program for new kindergarten teachers occurs inhouse. The Head Start teachers who want more communication with the kindergarten program have initiated visits to the kindergarten for their staff. They have also provided workshops and training about Head Start and have invited kindergarten teachers, though none has participated.

In Plainville, prekindergarten staff initiate almost all transition activity of this sort. They are strongly committed to a developmental approach to educating young children and see it as their role to educate the community about the principles so that teachers and parents accept and support their program. To that end, a formal orientation for teachers of grades K, 1, and 2 was held at the preschool in the fall. The staff member who is primarily responsible for the existence of the prekindergarten program in Plainville has visited the private kindergarten programs in town and the local home-based Head Start program, and has invited staff from these programs to the schoolbased prekindergarten program.

In Pioneer, the community Head Start has initiated visits to kindergarten and has invited kindergarten staff to visit Head Start, although at the time of the site visit none had done so. No kindergarten staff have attended the Head Start orientation, and communication between programs is rare. The inhouse preschool program, by contrast, participates in frequent informal visitations and communication.

Bear Valley's Head Start director is interested in orientation and classroom visitation but seems unclear about who should initiate such efforts. Both preschool and kindergarten staff in Bear Valley express a desire for more cross-orientation activities.

Lakeside School's model involving an outside agency as coordinator for transition activities removes the responsibility for initiating transition activities from both the kindergarten and prekindergarten programs. The network has coordinated classroom visitations for staff and regular meetings to facilitate communication. All preschool teachers have visited kindergarten and all kindergarten teachers have visited preschools. There have been formal visitations with discussions afterwards coordinated by one of the outside organizations.

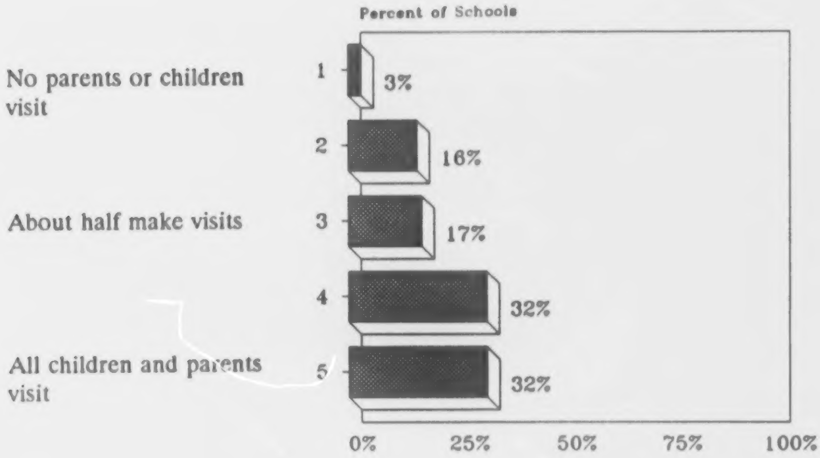
Welcoming Children and Parents

Three school survey items asked about the extent and nature of pre-enrollment visits by children and parents. We learned more about these activities in the site visits since all programs we visited plan and implement activities for children and families as part of the transition between prekindergarten and elementary school. Activities vary in formality, ranging from annual, highly scripted meetings and procedures to informal word-of-mouth communication and visits to schools.

School Visits and Orientations

The first survey item on this topic asked about the proportion of parents and children making school visitations prior to kindergarten. Figure III-5 shows that this is a common activity, with 81% of schools reporting that at least half of incoming children and parents visit their new school before the school year begins. In contrast to what is seen with other transition activities, more visits are made in low-poverty schools (mean rating of 4.1) than in moderate- (3.6) or high-poverty (3.3) schools. Such visitations are also more common in small schools (3.9) than in medium (3.7) or large (3.6) schools.

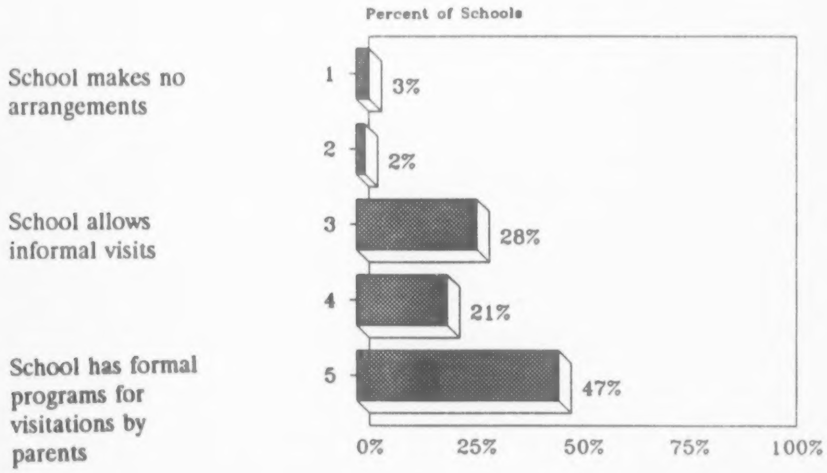
Figure III-5: ***Extent to Which Parents Visit Their New School Prior to the Beginning of the School Year***



In another part of the survey, respondents were asked to estimate the percentage (within certain ranges) of parents who make orientation visits to their child's future kindergarten class before school starts. Fifty-one percent of schools report that more than three-fourths of the parents of incoming children participate in such visits. Again, significantly greater participation is reported by low-poverty schools than by either moderate- or high-poverty schools.

To get an indication of how consistent or enduring parent pre-enrollment visitations might be, we asked school survey respondents to indicate the "formality of arrangements," using a 5-point scale. As seen in Figure III-6, the majority of schools appear to have formal or near-formal arrangements. (In fact, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, this item is the highest-rated transition activity that we asked about.) As with the other visitation items, low-poverty schools are more likely to have formal arrangements than either moderate- or high-poverty schools.

Figure III-6: ***Formality of Arrangements for School Visits by Parents of Entering Kindergartners***



Orienting Families

In the site visits, we saw a number of examples of schools providing for child and parent visits and orientations. Formal orientations tend to occur in the spring preceding the kindergarten year, although some sites have fall orientations. Seven of the eight sites hold orientations at the school for children and parents. Hillside has recently decided not to have a formal orientation, with the idea that it gives the wrong message to parents. Parents need to become fully involved in the program, said the principal, rather than to be invited in for a one-time meeting.

The spring orientations take several forms. Bear Valley's takes the shape of a formal meeting for parents, with a videotape about the kindergarten program and presentations by the school nurse, principal, and district administrator. While parents participate in this meeting, children visit the kindergarten class.

In some cases, the orientation meetings are held in conjunction with pre-entry screening or (in the case of the magnet school in Southside) with a recruitment fair. Four sites include screening or assessment activities in their orientation. In Bear Valley, incoming kindergartners attend a health fair which incorporates pre-entry screening, in addition to the spring orientation.

One site (Plainville), rather than holding a formal meeting, sends a letter to children and a booklet to parents in the summer as a means of orienting children and parents to the expectations of kindergarten. Because most parents are familiar with the school, either through the prekindergarten program or through older children, neighbors and friends, a formal orientation is believed to be unnecessary.

Orienting Children

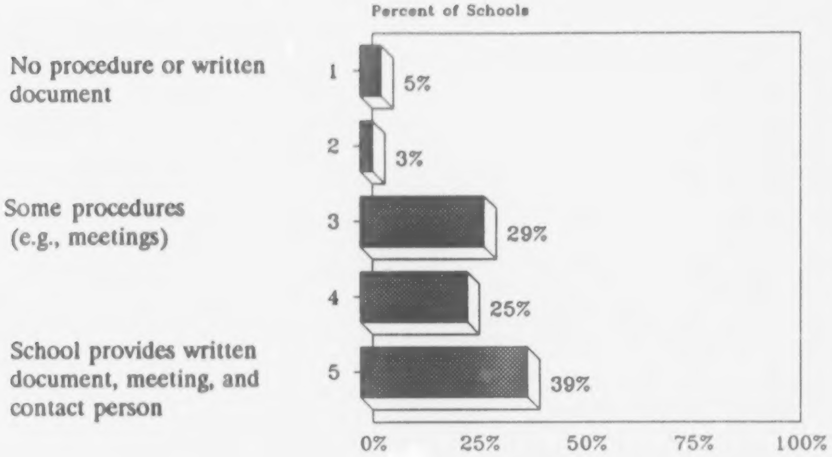
Some schools encourage school visits for children prior to entering kindergarten. In Pioneer, students visit the classroom individually during a regular class day, the aide shows them the room, and they watch the classroom activities. In Southside, the prekindergarten teacher brings the children to the kindergarten class one day. At Pioneer all classes make a visit to the next higher grade during the May "transition month." In Hillside, parents are invited to come in with children and visit the classroom on an informal basis.

Another way of orienting children to kindergarten is to introduce them gradually into the school setting. Two sites (Seaview and Westside) phase children into kindergarten during the first week of school. In Seaview, children come for only half a day during the first four days of school. In Westside, children start gradually in the fall, and parents stay in the classroom with their children during the first week.

Parental Rights and Responsibilities

A school survey item (C18) asked about the extent to which schools inform parents of entering kindergarten children about their rights and responsibilities in the public school system. Again, a 5-point scale indicated how formal or extensive this process is. The school responses are shown in Figure III-7. Almost all schools have some procedure for providing this information to parents. Responses did not differ by school poverty level, but ratings were higher in large and medium-size schools than in small schools.

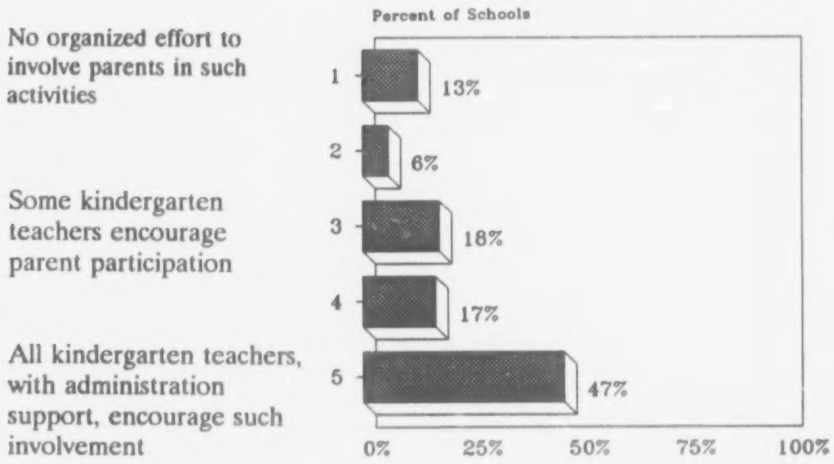
Figure III-7: ***Extent to Which Schools Have Procedures for Informing Incoming Parents of Their Rights and Responsibilities***



Parent Involvement in Transition

Schools also report a high degree of involvement of parents in classroom activities that are aimed at smoothing children's transition into public school. As Figure III-8 shows, the majority of schools say that they support and encourage parents to be involved in such classroom activities. Low-poverty schools report the highest degree of support and encouragement, with moderate-poverty schools the lowest.

Figure III-8: ***Extent to Which Schools Support and Encourage the Involvement of Parents in Classroom Activities Aimed at Smoothing Children's Transition into Public Schools***



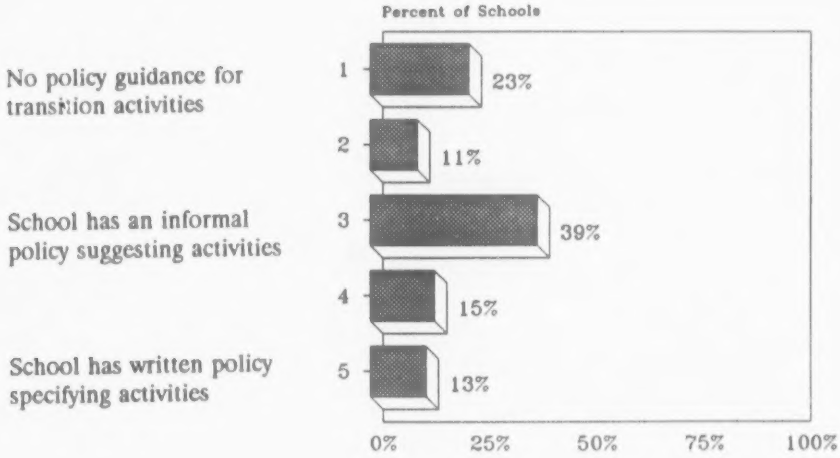
The Local Educational Context

Based on our survey data, experience of programs we visited, and the existing research base, we identified five aspects of the school or district context that are important to transition activities: policies, staff responsibilities, evaluation, funding, and business/community involvement.

District and School Policies

In the national sample, only 13% of schools report having a formal written school policy related to continuity. In one of two items related to transition policies (see Appendix E), schools reported on the extent to which there is a policy. As Figure III-9 shows, at least a quarter of the schools offer no policy guidance, and most others have "informal" policies at best. The mean rating for all schools of 2.8 suggests the presence of "informal policies" as the norm. High-poverty schools, however, have higher ratings (3.0) than low-poverty (2.85) or moderate-poverty (2.7) schools.

Figure III-9: ***Extent to Which Schools Have Policies Specifying Transition Activities***



On the other policy-relevant item, 60% of schools say that transition activities are not aimed at any particular group of students. Of the 40% of schools that do target their transition activities toward a particular group, two-thirds are most concerned with transitions for handicapped children. One-third target activities toward children from low-income families, and one-third toward limited-English proficient children.

Some of the schools in our site visit sample indicated that they had transition policies, but without exception, when the policies were examined, we found they did not refer directly to continuity. Instead, they dealt with issues such as kindergarten eligibility or established certain preschool or kindergarten program guidelines. Even so, a number of policies within schools and districts affect continuity in one way or another. Policies on standardized achievement testing, for example, were cited in three schools as having an influence on early childhood programs and provide one tug in the tension surrounding continuity in some sites.

A districtwide resolution on child development provides a climate of encouragement for Southside's early childhood magnet school. Policies discouraging retention in kindergarten at two sites affect continuity for children at those schools. District policies on curriculum that apply to both preschool and kindergarten (as in Hillside) also affect continuity.

Staff Responsibilities

According to the nationwide survey, kindergarten teachers are responsible for transition activities in 36% of the schools, while only 24% of the schools cite building administrators and 18% cite district administrators as having this responsibility.

The staff person considered responsible for transition activities differs considerably across the eight sites. In three sites it is the principal of the school, in two sites a district administrator, in one site an assistant principal, in another the administrative assistant for the preschool. In the site that follows the network strategy, the person responsible for transition activities is a coordinator funded by and located at an outside organization. When we asked specifically about one aspect of transition -- initiating coordination between kindergarten and preschools -- we found that in three schools, the kindergarten teachers are responsible; in two schools, the principals are.

The higher percentage for administrators in the site visit schools is probably due to the difference between the overall national sample and the schools that were chosen for indepth study: in the national sample, most of the schools emphasize orientation activities, which might easily be coordinated by kindergarten teachers. On the other hand, the more extensive activities undertaken by the site visit schools lend themselves to being coordinated by an administrator with broader authority.

Evaluation

According to the school survey respondents, 45% of schools have evaluated various outcomes of their transition activities. The evaluations that have been done address a variety of topics: teacher satisfaction with transition activities, parent satisfaction, effects on children's academic and social performance, and parent participation in continuity activities. After exploring evaluation activities at the sites, we suspect that these evaluations are not true evaluations of the transition activities, per se, and are not particularly rigorous. Thus, this survey finding should be interpreted cautiously.

> Several of the site visit schools stated that they have conducted evaluations of their transition activities, but on closer inspection it was discovered that the evaluations were not of the transition activities per se but of funded programs, such as Chapter 1, or of teacher performance. In Hillside, a longitudinal study of the elementary school progress of children who came through the migrant preschool program was perceived locally as not simply an evaluation of the preschool program, but of transition (even though the study could not separate the effects of the two).
>
> In the evaluations that were conducted, schools collect their information from teachers (in two schools), from classroom observation (in two schools), and through the use of a test (in one school). These evaluations are conducted by the principal in three schools, though one of these three also said the vice principal and kindergarten teachers conduct evaluations, and one said the kindergarten teachers and the parents conduct evaluations. In Westside and Seaview, the evaluations are used to improve the continuity programs. In Plainville, they are used for teacher evaluations, staff development needs, and state reports.

Funding

Although 52% of schools report "no special funds" for transition activities, almost half (48%) of the schools in the national sample report that funds support transition activities. Of these, the funding for 79% of the schools comes from the local school district. In 33% of the cases, some funding is provided by parent organizations; funding is provided by state departments of education in 26% and by federal agencies in 18% of the schools.

At most of the indepth sites, transition activities are supported at least in part by some outside funding. Five programs use federal or state compensatory education funds, two of them for state-mandated preschool programs. Chapter 1 funds pay for kindergarten classroom aides in Lakeside; in Westside, Chapter 1 funds support staff development activities. State grant monies to the school in Plainville provide release time for teachers. The state funds an extended-day kindergarten in Bear Valley. At Hillside, the program is supported by Migrant Head Start and state funds. In Lakeside, the outside organization funds a coordinator for the network.

Business/ Community Involvement

Six percent of schools in the national sample receive funding from sources other than public agencies or private foundations; it is not known how much of that other funding might come from business partnerships or other community organizations.

The school in Bear Valley relies on help from business and community partnerships to supplement resources available from local, state, and federal funds. Local corporations provide eyeglasses, clothing, money, and volunteers. A public health agency gives the time of a nurse-practitioner who spends one day a week at the school. Local organizations provide volunteers, who provide child care so that parents can attend the weekly parent sessions, and small teddy bears to be given to students as special rewards for progress. One local high tech corporation has promised to hire five parents of Bear Valley students. The other seven sites do not appear to use business partnerships in the same way.

Continuity Beyond Kindergarten

In addition to the transition between preschool and kindergarten, this study examined continuity in the grades beyond kindergarten. According to the school survey, 80% of U.S. schools have "planned activities...to help children with transitions through the grades beyond kindergarten." As noted in the vignettes, schools in the site visit sample have adopted a number of different transition activities to facilitate continuity beyond kindergarten.

Types of Articulation Beyond Kindergarten

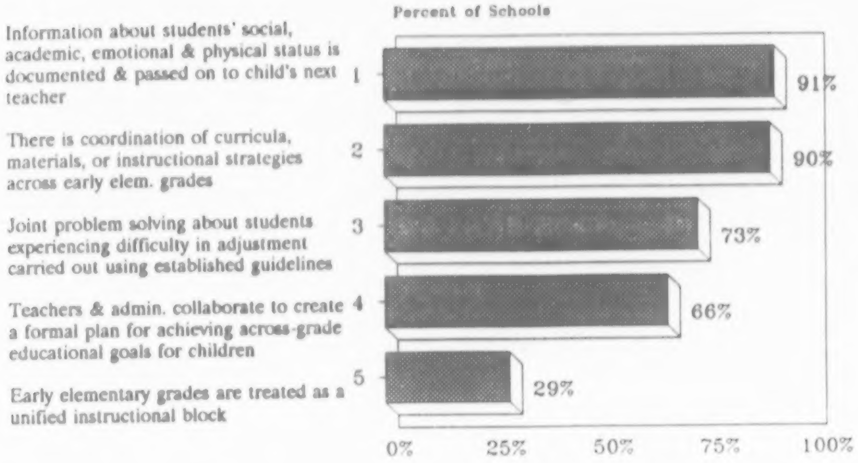
According to the surveys, more than half of the districts (57%) have activities designed to help children with transitions through the grades beyond kindergarten. Size is a significant factor determining whether districts provide such continuity, with large (75%) and medium-size districts (67%) being most likely to report such activities; only 45% of small districts report these activities.

According to the school survey, a high percentage of schools (80%) report transition activities beyond kindergarten. Such activities are especially common in low-poverty schools (84%) and large schools (89%).

Figure III-10 illustrates that, of the 80% of schools with transition activities beyond kindergarten, there is considerable variation in the types of articulation that are found. About nine out of ten of these schools (that is, about 72% of all schools) transmit student information through the grades and have coordinated curriculum and instructional strategies across the early elementary grades. The fact that there is a coordinated curriculum through the early grades, however, does not tell us anything about the nature or substance of that curriculum.

It is much less common for schools to treat the early grades as a unified instructional block, as is recommended by the National Association of State Boards of Education (1988). We find 29% of the schools with articulation activities beyond kindergarten (or 23% of all schools) reporting that they have such a unified block. Again, we did not ask questions of sufficient depth to learn about the nature of these instructional units.

Figure III-10: Types of Articulation in Schools Designed to Help Children with Transitions Through the Grades Beyond Kindergarten



> The Seaview magnet school, with its preschool to sixth grade British Infant School model, offers a seamless transition for children throughout elementary school. Teachers work closely together and the philosophies and approaches are integrated through the grades. Similar situations exist in Westside and Southside except their coordinated curriculum runs only through grade 2.
>
> In Bear Valley, a whole language approach rather than a particular early childhood curriculum unifies grades in the school. At the same time, commitment to success for children creates an atmosphere in which teachers work together across the grades as well as within grade levels to ensure continuity. In Plainville, children are grouped by ability from kindergarten on, a practice meant to facilitate continuity. In Hillside, a newly funded program will lower staff-child ratios, encourage heterogeneous grouping of children, and support greater parent involvement, all from kindergarten through the third grade.

Breadth of Articulation

An indication of the breadth of these activities in schools is seen in the number of different activities (out of the five) checked by the school respondents. On average, schools report 3.5 activities. This "score" is significantly influenced by school poverty, with high-poverty schools reporting the fewest (3.2), moderate-poverty schools the most (3.7); low-poverty schools report an average of 3.5 different types of articulation through the grades beyond kindergarten.

Generally, the principal (in 40% of the schools) or a teacher (in 27% of the schools) is responsible for these articulation efforts. School poverty level significantly affects the locus of responsibility: in low-poverty schools, the principal is more likely to be responsible than a teacher (in 44% vs. 23% of the schools, respectively), whereas in high-poverty schools they are equally likely to have this responsibility (principals in 34% and a teacher in 35% of high-poverty schools).

Parent Involvement Beyond Kindergarten

Parents are contributors to the continuity process both formally and informally. Their involvement beyond the preschool-kindergarten transition may contribute to greater continuity. In Plainville, the stable nature of the small community lends itself to frequent, ongoing contact between parents and school. Many of the parents interviewed attended Plainville School as children and know the school personnel as friends and neighbors. Parents are comfortable calling school personnel at home, talking with them at the grocery store, at church, or during recreational activities. The frequent, informal communication network strengthens the shared values of home and school. Parents at Hillside are very involved with their program at the preschool level, though less so in elementary school. One parent there found her own involvement so beneficial to her family that she expressed a desire for a policy mandating parent involvement from preschool through high school. Parents in Seaview and Southside who choose the school for their children maintain high levels of involvement in the school despite the distance from home to the magnet school.

Parents in sites with academically oriented kindergartens told us they are frustrated in that the active parental involvement they experienced with preschool is not evident in the elementary school. Parents who take an active stance and volunteer to spend time in the classroom overcome the barrier and become actively involved in education, but it is the parent who makes the effort. In the more developmental programs visited, it seems clear that parents perceive schools to be more welcoming and respectful.

As we learned in Chapter II, many schools approach the issue of continuity beyond kindergarten by creating special arrangements for children whose development does not match that of others in the class. Extra-year programs and retention are common solutions, but as we saw on our site visits, alternatives to those approaches are possible.

What we learned during site visits about grade retention and extra-year classes seems to provide a different perspective on continuity through the grades. All sites claim to take the child where he or she is and modify the program accordingly. In kindergarten this philosophy is not always matched in practice, and the degree to which it holds beyond kindergarten varies considerably across sites. We did not collect data on retention policies beyond kindergarten, but several sites volunteered that children are now retained in first or second grade rather than being held back in kindergarten. Only Lakeside and Westside have clear school-wide policies against retention. Even schools with developmental curriculum blocks are supportive of retention for some children. Seaview utilizes multi-age grouping to accommodate children of varying developmental levels, but they do retain children, usually in first grade.

Bear Valley has created a special modification of the first grade curriculum for children who may not be quite ready for regular first grade, as an alternative to a formal transition class. They too, retain more children in first grade than any other grade. Standards for academic readiness in first grade and beyond are enforced in Plainville; retention in first or second grade is not uncommon and is supported by the administration.

Pioneer has a formal transition class for children who are not ready for first grade. The class is designed for children who are not confident, not independent, and who need more adult help. Forty percent of kindergartners go into the transition classes; 75% of those children then go to grade 1. For most children at Pioneer, then, transition is a form of retention.

Summary

Whether one takes the perspective of the site visits or of the national surveys, it must be concluded that preschool-to-kindergarten transition activities are not a high priority of our nation's schools. For example, only 10% of schools report systematic communication between kindergarten teachers and all previous caregivers or teachers about incoming students; in 32% of schools, all incoming children and their parents visit their new school prior to the start of kindergarten.

The two key elements of transition are coordination/communication and parent involvement. The former happens more in high-poverty schools; the latter is more common in low-poverty schools. The fact that parental participation in transition activities is higher in low-poverty schools suggests that new and/or different strategies for reaching and involving low-income parents is necessary. There may be an opportunity for federal programs (more prevalent in high-poverty schools) to have an impact in this regard.

Schools have established a number of mechanisms designed to link preschools and kindergartens. Although there is much more that can be done to forge these links, limited efforts are underway in the areas of coordinating curricula, providing joint training for staffs from both levels, giving staffs from both levels opportunities to learn about each other, and general communication. Connections are most likely to occur through the sharing of information. Both the surveys and site visits show that schools are trying a number of different strategies in order to share information between levels.

We began the study thinking policies are important, because they are formal representations of the beliefs and intentions of staff. The finding that formal policies are so rare (only 13% of schools have them), and that transition activities are not common, supports their importance. The apparent lack of any systematic evaluations of the impact of transition activities is another sign of the policy vacuum.

Even in the absence of guiding policies, however, schools do demonstrate some concern about their incoming kindergartners, primarily through activities to "welcome" the incoming children and their parents. Orientations and visitations are common, but not particularly innovative; in fact, one might expect them to be universal.

The emergence of programmatic efforts (in about 80% of schools) at promoting continuity beyond kindergarten is very encouraging, and should be the focus of future research. It is important to note the suggestion from some site-visit respondents that the kindergarten-to-first grade transition may be at least as critical in some schools as the preschool-kindergarten transition that is the focus of this study.

CHAPTER IV: INFLUENCES ON CONTINUITY AND TRANSITION ACTIVITIES

Introduction
Structural Arrangements, Transition Activities, and Approaches to Continuity
Regression Analysis of Survey Data
Structural Influences on School Transition Activities
Influences on Continuity
Summary: Influences on Continuity and Transition

IV. INFLUENCES ON CONTINUITY AND TRANSITION ACTIVITIES

Introduction

Focus of Chapter

Chapter III described the nature and frequency of schools' transition activities and provided illustrations from the site visits. We found that poverty is strongly related to the extent of transition activities, with coordination and communication efforts being more common in high-poverty schools and parent involvement in transition being greater in low-poverty schools. In this chapter, we examine other influences on transition activities.

As we indicated at the beginning of this report, the ultimate purpose of transition activities is to enhance the continuity of children's experience. The surveys provided extensive information on transition activities, but capturing the continuity experienced by children is more difficult. Through the observations and interviews conducted during site visits, we attempted to get closer to the experience of continuity. This chapter begins by reporting what we learned about factors influencing transition activities (primarily from the surveys, but also incorporating site visit data) and then moves to a discussion of what may be the key factors in determining the continuity experienced by children.

We began the study with some assumptions about which factors might affect the extent to which schools implement transition activities and create continuity for children. These were then supplemented with our site visit experience. Through analysis of the interview and observation data, four broad categories of influence emerged:

- **Structural influence.** Although this primarily concerns the location of the preschool(s) vis à vis the kindergarten program, structural factors also include the ways in which preschool programs and the schools relate to each other organizationally as well as physically and describe the degree to which transition activities have become formalized or institutionalized.

- **Curriculum.** This includes teacher and administrator views about developmentally appropriate practice, the developmental appropriateness of preschool and kindergarten programs, and the similarity of approaches at the two levels.

- **Attitudes toward children and parents.** As we reported in Chapter II, the attitudes of school personnel toward parents and children are critical to what we call school climate. Related to these attitudes are the role(s) that parents play in the schools and the nature of the leadership provided by the school administrators.

- **Level of poverty.** As illuminated in the survey results (Chapter III), poverty is a powerful force in shaping school practices that ease or exacerbate transition difficulties for children. Because this has already been described in Chapter III, the influence of poverty is not a major focus of this chapter. Furthermore, all schools participating in the site visits serve high proportions of children from low-income families, so our indepth data do not inform this discussion.

Highlights of Findings

A number of findings of this chapter must be viewed as tentative and less clear-cut than those of Chapters II and III. We are most confident in reporting that three general aspects of schools consistently relate to the extent of transition activities in schools.

- Schools show more coordination and communication with preschools when district or school persons have assigned responsibilities for coordinating the activities, the preschool is located in the school, there are more positive attitudes toward children and parents, and kindergartens rate higher on both developmental and academic practices.
- Schools are more likely to involve parents in transition activities when there are more positive attitudes toward children and parents, there are more parent involvement opportunities in general, and kindergarten is more developmental. Schools that involve parents more in transition also have fewer children placed in transition classes, fewer children with difficulty adjusting to kindergarten, a district or school person responsible for the transition activities, and they are smaller, lower-poverty level schools.
- Preschool staff are more likely to be involved in transition activities when the school houses a preschool program. However, examination of structural arrangements at the indepth sites clearly shows that having the preschool in the school can lead to more transition activity, but physical proximity is no guarantee of either coordination or continuity.

Plan for the Chapter

Transition activities, and the continuity of experience that children may gain from them, are related in complex ways to the characteristics of schools we have studied. The most systematic and generalizable information on transition activities comes from the school survey, but we have greater insight into how these activities actually occur from the site visits. Everything we have learned about continuity for children has come from the site visits. To provide a framework for understanding the various findings, this chapter begins with a detailed presentation of the structural arrangements found at the eight sites. The discussion shows how these structural arrangements are related to the particular transition activities and strategies for achieving continuity and lays the groundwork for later discussions of survey and site visit findings. The next section of the chapter reports on regression analyses of school survey items, which suggest specific variables measured in the survey that relate to the extent to which schools have implemented transition activities. The remainder of the chapter focuses on continuity. In the summary, the factors that appear to influence both transition and continuity are presented.

Structural Arrangements, Transition Activities, and Approaches to Continuity

We saw five different structural arrangements in the eight sites. In each case, we observed strategies intended to ensure continuity and success of children coming into kindergarten. In three of the arrangements, all children come from preschools located outside of the school; in other cases, there are preschool classrooms in the same building with kindergarten and elementary grades. These different configurations do not encompass all possible structures but illustrate several contexts in which programs are defining and implementing transition, and provide information on the nature of transition activities.

The Early Childhood Unit

School

Developmental Preschool	Developmental Kindergarten	Developmental Grade 1	Developmental Grade 2

Two of the schools (Seaview Magnet and Southside Early Childhood School) create continuity for children with an early childhood unit that includes the preschool program as an integral part. (At Seaview, the coordinated curriculum even extends through grade 6). For children attending these schools, there is very little discontinuity from preschool through grade 2. Formal transition activities are less evident in these schools than in schools with philosophical or pedagogical discontinuity. Practices that enhance continuity have become institutionalized within these early childhood units to the degree that they are not even regarded as transition activities. Teachers work together on curriculum committees, and parent involvement is high throughout the school. In one of the schools, classrooms employ multiage grouping, and children are moved between grades when they are ready rather than waiting until the end of the year.

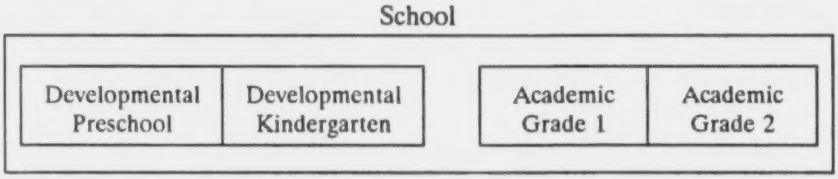
Continuity at Seaview Magnet School stems from the school's child-centered approach, including its use of multi-age classrooms. Both the principal and the teaching staff implement the approach and help parents gain an understanding of developmentally appropriate learning. The school's whole-child, developmental ideology is further reinforced through staff development workshops and selective hiring practices that seek out teachers who fit the school's model.

Southside School was designed as an early childhood center. The approach to continuity for children participating in the magnet program is based upon a child-centered approach to education and the adoption of a coordinated language-based curriculum, as well as selective teacher hiring practices aimed at building a cohesive staff that share the same developmental perspective. A preschool program integral to the early childhood unit and strong parent involvement throughout the school are also critical.

In both schools, a strong commitment to the principles of early childhood education drives the approach to continuity. The principals of both schools had been early childhood teachers prior to becoming principals. The Southside school contains preschool through second grade only, making it a regional early childhood center within the district. The major transition point for children attending Southside is not between preschool and kindergarten, but between second and third grade. Children at Seaview Magnet School attend developmental programs through grade 6, and their major transition point comes at their entry into grade 7.

The experience of these schools suggests a possible disadvantage to this configuration. In both schools, few or no transition activities are geared toward creating continuity for the children who attend preschools other than the inhouse preschool; all the energies are focused within the early childhood unit. The degree of institutionalization of transition activities and the relative continuity for children moving from the inhouse preschool to kindergarten may actually obscure awareness of the need for discrete transition activities for those children entering kindergarten from other preschool programs or from home.

The Partial Early Childhood Unit



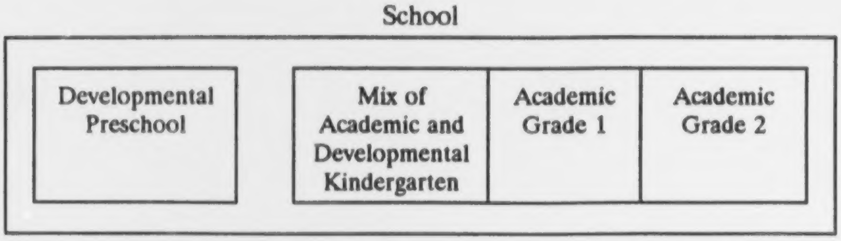
In one school (Pioneer Primary), a developmentally appropriate program has been mandated for children in both preschool and kindergarten, so that continuity is ensured between those two grades. First grade, on the other hand, is academically oriented, and some discontinuity exists for children moving from kindergarten to first grade. There is considerable tension between the developmental and academic programs. The major transition for children in such programs then is not between preschool and kindergarten but between kindergarten and grade 1.

A state-supported preschool program employing the High/Scope model is instrumental in the approach to continuity adopted by the staff at Pioneer. Strongly supported by the principal, the preschool's influence contributed to changes in kindergarten. Community preschools, too, employ the High/Scope curriculum, and so children, regardless of where they attend preschool, experience curricular continuity when they enter kindergarten. Kindergarten retention is practiced as a way of ensuring children's readiness.

Despite the shared curricular approach, formal orientation visits for children and parents are planned annually. Activities involving teachers are less formal. In the inhouse preschool, interaction between preschool and kindergarten teachers is informal and frequent. Head Start and other preschool teachers, however, have infrequent contact with kindergarten teachers.

Children are tested and must achieve a minimum score in order to move to grade 1. Children who have completed kindergarten but do not meet the grade 1 standards are either retained in kindergarten or placed in a transition class.

In-School Preschools



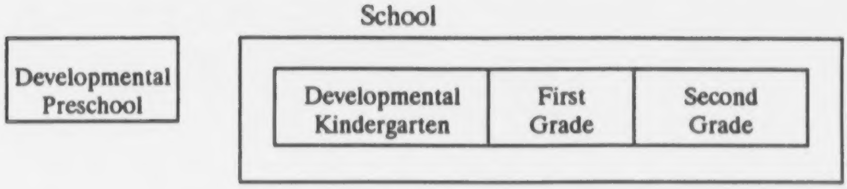
Both Hillside and Plainville have state or federally funded preschools located in the schools but not integrated with the rest of the school either philosophically or pedagogically. In both schools, staff are striving to make traditionally academic kindergartens more developmentally appropriate. Kindergarten teachers reported feeling pressure from first grade teachers to prepare the children academically while, at the same time, they are attracted to the philosophy and approach used in the preschool. The result is a kindergarten program that is neither developmental nor academic but a mixture of both. The impetus for transition activities in both cases is coming from the preschool staff rather than from the kindergarten or the school administration.

Hillside bases its approach to continuity on three inter-related components: (1) a preschool program with strong parent involvement; (2) a developmental kindergarten for children deemed not ready for the more academic kindergarten; and (3) use of the same language-based curriculum in preschool and kindergarten.

Concern with continuity between preschool and kindergarten began in Plainville when the school received a state grant for a preschool program for at-risk children. Conceptualization of continuity is heavily reliant on the presence of the preschool program in the school and the vision and leadership of the administrative assistant to promote developmentally appropriate practice in the school.

In both programs, the transition activities are mostly informal between preschool and kindergarten teachers. The prekindergarten programs have made more overtures to the kindergartens than have kindergartens to the preschools. Hillside holds a formal orientation in the spring for incoming kindergarten children and parents while such activities are informal in Plainville.

Kindergarten Intervention



This approach appears in two schools (Bear Valley and Westside), and is response to a situation in which there is no preschool in the public school. The objective is to meet the needs of children coming in to kindergarten so that any sense of discontinuity is overcome and children are able to experience success in kindergarten, but the focus of activities (the "intervention") is only at the kindergarten level.

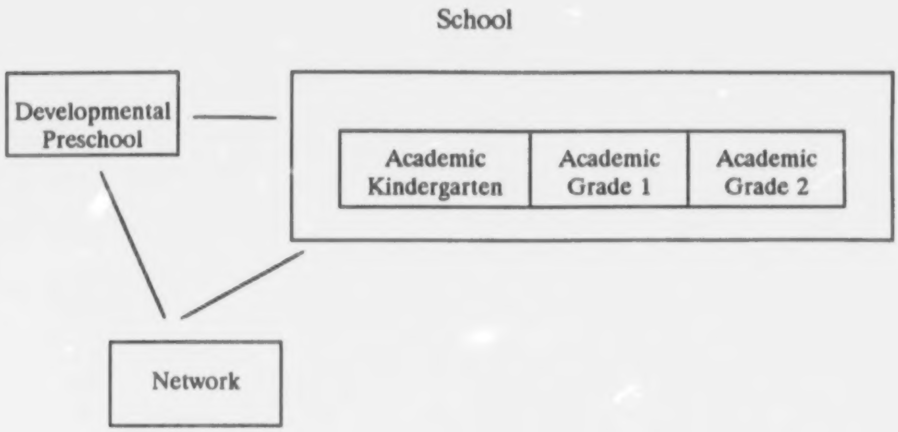
Schools adopting this strategy view the kindergarten program as more than education -- an attempt is made to meet the needs of the whole child. Rather than working with the preschools to bridge a gap, the school takes on the responsibility for easing the transition into kindergarten by eliminating barriers to children's success within the kindergarten program and in other areas where the school has more direct control. While there is little or no coordination between preschools and kindergartens in these schools, there is considerable coordination with community social service agencies and with families once children are in kindergarten. Transition activities, including a health fair in Bear Valley and orientation for parents and children in both schools, focus on parents as a vehicle for transition rather than on preschools.

Continuity at Westside focuses upon providing a developmentally appropriate program for children from the time they enter kindergarten and providing family support through collaboration with community social service agencies. There are strong support services for teachers and parents.

At Bear Valley School, continuity is a product of the holistic approach taken by the school. The principal and teachers work together, within the context of a developmental, child-centered educational climate, to ensure that all the needs of children are addressed. The school views health, food, decent clothing, safety, and support for parents as necessary to the academic success of children, and it attempts to provide all of these support services in addition to its regular program.

In both cases seen in this study, the feeder preschools and kindergartens share somewhat similar educational values. Continuity therefore exists for children moving from one program to another. However, the continuity is based on chance and may not continue if individual teachers or administrators change, unless a more formal linkage is established.

The Network



This strategy was developed in Lakeside in response to a perceived need for greater continuity between preschools and a kindergarten that are not located in the same building and that are based on very different philosophies of early childhood education. There is one small preschool program in the building which, unlike the community preschools, is academic in nature. Designed to serve children who miss the age cut-off for kindergarten, the program only operates in years when there are sufficient children.

The preschool philosophy is family-centered and developmental in nature while the kindergarten is very academic. Until the formation of the Network, there was very little communication or coordination among the programs.

The networking occurs through an "at-risk committee" consisting of public school administrators and teachers, preschool administrators and teachers, and representatives from two local organizations. This group met throughout the year to build a network bridging the gap between the programs and forging bonds of communication between them. The network is funded and coordinated by an outside agency. The committee has planned and implemented several transition activities including joint classroom visitations between preschool and kindergarten teachers, screening and registration at the preschools, and ongoing opportunities for teachers to learn about each other's programs.

The major transition point for children moving from preschool to kindergarten in Lakeside is indeed the preschool to kindergarten transition. Teachers from preschool and kindergarten have very different ideas about appropriate education for young children and also about the goals of transition activities. Kindergarten teachers wanted to meet in order to educate preschool teachers in ways to get children ready academically for kindergarten while preschool personnel and the coordinators viewed the network as a possible avenue to make the kindergartens more responsive to the developmental needs of children.

This program has only been in operation for a year and it is yet to be determined how effective the network's efforts are. We included this site in our study because it represents a strategy that schools can adopt or adapt when the philosophical and pedagogical gap between preschool and kindergarten is wide and when preschools and kindergartens do not share physical space.

Summary of Structural Arrangements

The discussion of these five structural configurations shows that the physical location of the preschools with respect to the elementary school can influence the nature and extent of transition activities, but just as strongly demonstrates that physical proximity by no means guarantees that there will be more coordination or better continuity. In two cases where preschools are separate, schools provide developmentally appropriate kindergartens (rather than coordinated transition activities) as their way of enhancing continuity. (More is said later in this chapter about the role of curriculum in continuity for children.) In the third case with separate preschools, a committee established a network to improve communication and coordination. In the five cases with preschools in the school, a variety of transition mechanisms are in place, but curricular continuity is highly varied. Two sites have a coordinated curriculum that extends from preschool through at least second grade, one has preschool-kindergarten continuity but no kindergarten-grade 1 continuity, and two do not achieve high preschool-kindergarten continuity because the programs are funded and administered through different auspices even though located together physically.

Finally, we have seen that transition activities develop as a means of promoting continuity and may vary depending on how continuity is defined. Our site visit experience suggests three major factors that distinguish approaches to continuity:

- decisions about the value of promoting continuity;
- the timing of intervention (e.g., between preschool and kindergarten, between kindergarten and first grade, the point at which children leave elementary school); and
- the best strategies for promoting continuity (e.g., parent involvement, collaboration and communication with preschools, coordinated curricula, housing preschools in schools, providing developmentally appropriate kindergartens, developing extra-year programs, retaining children, or coordinating with community agencies to provide family support).

Regression Analysis of Survey Data

As we saw in Chapter III, the transition activities occurring in schools are of two basic types: those activities involving coordination and communication between preschool and kindergarten teachers, and those activities involving parents in specific transition activities. In order to better understand the influences on each type of transition activity, we conducted stepwise regression analyses to see which variables would best predict each aspect of transition. The following variables were entered as predictors (school survey item numbers are in parentheses):

- School enrollment (A1)
- Percentage of students eligible for free/reduced price lunch (A3)
- Percentage of children retained in kindergarten (B2)
- Percentage of children placed in transition classes (B3)
- Number of parent involvement activities provided by the school (B11)
- Number of areas in which parents directly participate in school operations and policy (B12)
- Degree of developmental practices in kindergarten (B13, factor 1)
- Degree of academic practices in kindergarten (B13, factor 2)
- School climate -- general (C32-42, factor 1)
- Perceived difficulty children have adjusting to kindergarten (sum of C1-11)
- Whether there is someone at the school responsible for coordinating transition activities (C23)
- Whether there is someone at the district responsible for coordinating transition activities (C24)
- Presence of a preschool program in the school (D box)

All of these variables have been described in Chapters II and III and can be found in the school and district surveys in Appendices D and E. These variables were entered into separate stepwise regression analyses with the two transition factors.

Predictors of Coordination and Communication

The equation predicting the coordination/communication factor contains seven predictor variables accounting for 19% of the variance. No single predictor accounted for a large proportion of the variance, but the variables that account for the greatest share of the variance in this model relate to three of the areas of influence identified at the beginning of the chapter:

- structural influences (presence of a district or school person responsible for coordinating transition activities, location of preschool);

- attitudes toward children and parents (school climate factor 1 and extent of parent participation in school policies and operations); and

- curriculum (developmental and academic approaches in kindergarten).

Predictors of Parent Involvement in Transition

Nine statistically significant predictors emerged from the regression of the second transition factor, parent involvement in transition. In this case, all four areas of influence discussed at the beginning of this chapter are represented among the predictor variables:

- attitudes toward children and parents (school climate factor 1, parent involvement opportunities);
- curriculum (developmental appropriateness of kindergarten, assignment of children to transition classes, and difficulty children have adjusting to kindergarten);
- structural influences (presence of a district or school person responsible for coordinating transition activities and school enrollment or size); and
- school poverty level (percent eligible for free/reduced price lunch).

The most important predictor of parent involvement in transition is the school climate factor that seems to reflect the school's attitudes toward parents and children. The schools' provision of parent involvement opportunities is consistent with this, as is a developmental curriculum focus and the perception that children have less difficulty adjusting to kindergarten. Three structural variables are among the predictors, again confirming the importance of having staff assigned responsibility for the transition activities.

If we relied solely on the survey data, we would regard aspects of a school program, including structure and curriculum, as only somewhat important because the relationships revealed by the regression analyses are not particularly strong. However, site visit findings are entirely consistent with the survey data and suggest that these aspects are important and worthy of attention.

Structural Influences on School Transition Activities

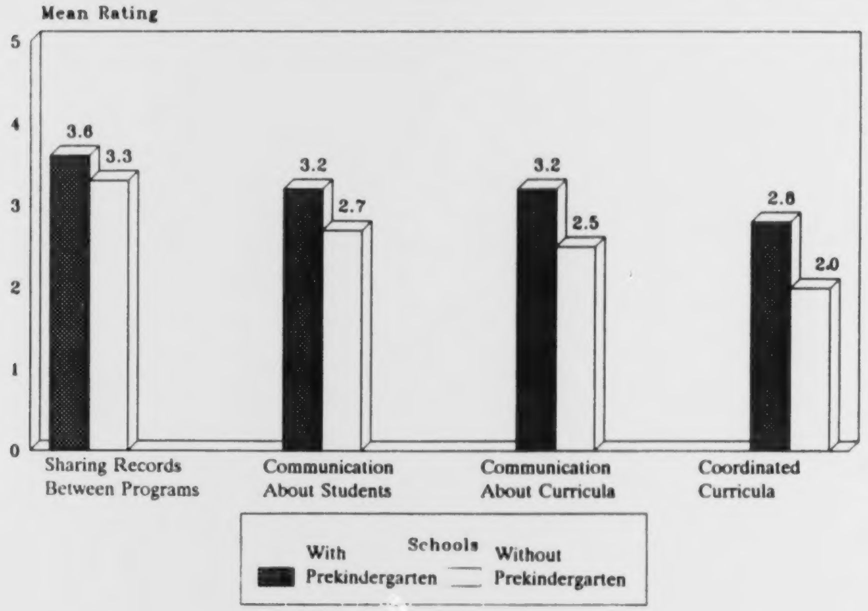
We noted in Chapter III that, overall, transition activities are not occurring widely. Only about one-fifth (21%) of responding districts claim a "wide range" of activities, while almost one third (31%) of districts report no organized transition activities at all. When transition activities do occur, however, we are interested in understanding what may account for their nature and frequency. The following sections present evidence both from the surveys and from the site visits that structural factors, such as the location of preschools and the organizational relations between kindergarten and prekindergarten programs, influence school transition activities.

Effects of Presence of Preschool on Communication and Coordination

The school survey provided evidence that when a preschool program is located in the school, communication and coordination are more apt to occur. A number of important differences were found between schools with and without preschool programs. The extent to which schools implement certain transition activities differs significantly as a function of whether or not the school has a preschool program. (See pp. E-12 to E-14 in Appendix E, or Figures III-1 to III-9 in Chapter III for the specifics on the rating scales used.)

Figure IV-1 shows the four transition activities on which there is a significant difference. All four of the activities (sharing records between programs, kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers communicating about incoming students, teachers communicating about curriculum, and planned articulation between the preschool and kindergarten curricula) are more likely to occur when the preschool is in the school. Although the differences in these ratings are not large, the consistent pattern suggests an important influence of location.

Figure IV-1: ***Impact of Presence of Preschool on Communication and Coordination Activities***



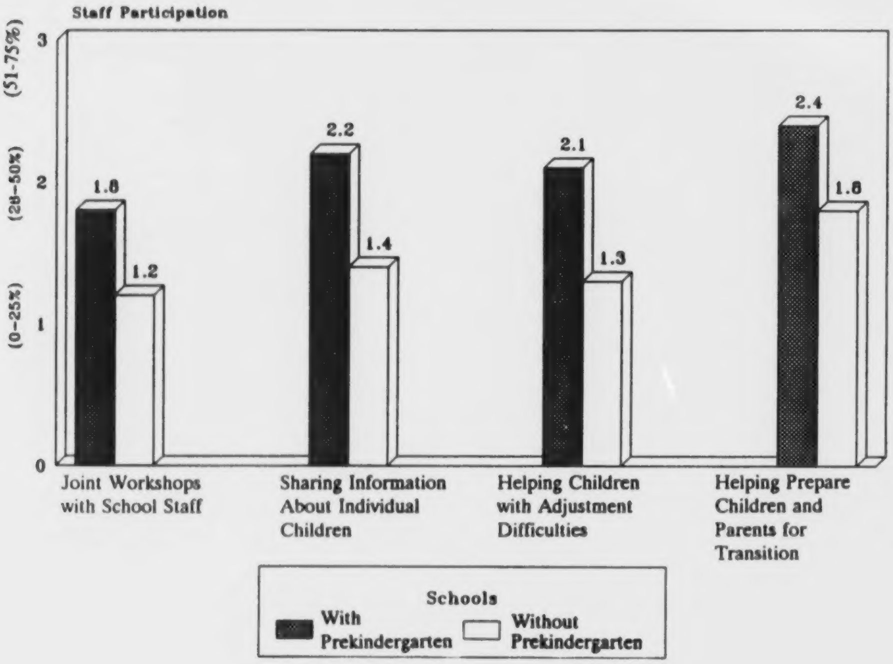
Our interviews at the eight sites revealed that the extent of communication between preschool and kindergarten staff is a function of several factors, one of which is the presence of a preschool program. School personnel in sites without preschool programs in the schools do not communicate regularly with preschool programs. In Westside, while coordinated curricula and frequent communication characterize the program between kindergarten and grade 3, these are not as evident between preschool and kindergarten. The principal in Bear Valley finds it difficult to communicate with the out-of-school preschools, but makes the effort. She would prefer to have a preschool program in her building.

In Seaview, Southside, and Pioneer (with preschools in the building and also a coordinated curriculum), there is considerable communication and coordination between preschool and kindergartners within the school, but virtually none with other prekindergarten programs. In some places (e.g., Hillside, where the in-school preschool and kindergarten fall under different funding and leadership auspices), the communication could be improved even within the school boundaries, and occurs only rarely with the separately administered Head Start program.

Influence of Location on Preschool Staff Participation in Transition Activities

Another benefit of having the preschool in the school is greater involvement of preschool staff in such activities as joint workshops with school staff, sharing information with school staff about individual children, helping children with the adjustment to kindergarten, and talking with children and parents to help prepare them for the transition into kindergarten. This is shown in Figure IV-2, based on school survey respondents' reports of preschool staff participation in transition activities. Figure IV-2 shows that in every area asked about there is greater participation by preschool staff when the preschool is in the school (rating of 1 indicates 0-25% participation, 2 indicates 26-50% participation, 3 indicates 51-75%).

Figure IV-2: Extent to Which Preschool Staff Participate in Four Transition Activities as a Function of Location



Our site visit experience corroborates this national finding, while at the same time suggesting that other factors can be important, too. In Southside, Seaview, and Pioneer (with preschools and kindergartens located in the same buildings), all teachers, regardless of grade level taught, participate in the same inservice workshops and school committee meetings. Sharing information, helping children adjust, and preparing children for kindergarten occur informally and are now institutionalized. (In fact, teachers and administrators at these sites do not view these activities as discrete transition activities but, rather, "the ways things are done.") The same linkage, however, did not extend to preschool programs outside the school. We also saw an example, however, of a sizeable preschool program in the elementary school where the impetus for joint workshops comes from the preschool staff, and transition activities for sharing information and preparing children for kindergarten are more likely to be formalized events than informal exchanges among colleagues. In this case (Hillside), the preschool and kindergarten programs are under different administration and are separately funded. In the two schools without preschools or any formal transition activities (Westside and Bear Valley), initiation is also at the preschool level: attempts at joint training or collaborative activities geared toward facilitating children's transition to kindergarten are primarily initiated by the preschools with little participation of kindergarten staff.

Influences on Continuity

Measuring Continuity

We have made an effort to examine the continuity experienced by children, as well as the transition activities provided by the schools as they strive to create that continuity. This section adds this dimension to the discussion, based primarily on site visit data.

In Chapter I we defined continuity in terms of the experience of children but noted that we do not have a direct measure of it in this study. In an effort to create an overall index of continuity, we constructed a simple rating item for our site visitors to complete following their week of interviews and observations:

> To what extent do children at this site experience continuity as they go from preschool to kindergarten?

Site-visit teams answered this question for their sites using a five-point scale (from "very little" to "a great deal"). In the process of reviewing these ratings, the significance of location as the critical structural variable became immediately apparent. Site visitors found it impossible to give a single global rating that describes children's continuity experience at the school. For example, site visitors from one site said, "The rating would be 5 for children who attend preschool at the early childhood magnet school; 1 for others." The response for another site was, "5 for the children from Head Start; 3 for others."

Although having the preschool in the school may be critical for continuity, there are so many ways of achieving continuity that the role of location is very difficult to ascertain. Before discussing the importance of location, we describe the varied ways each of the indepth sites conceptualizes continuity.

Importance of Location for Continuity

In spite of the apparent importance of location, if the reader refers back to the structural arrangements presented in the previous section, it is apparent that location per se does not create continuity. It may be easier for programs to ensure curricular continuity when programs are in proximity and coordinated by an instructional leader, but factors other than location also contribute to continuity.

Schools having preschools in the elementary schools are not necessarily able to provide better continuity for most incoming kindergarten children. Even schools that seem to provide effective continuity within their own boundaries (Seaview, Southside, Hillside) almost completely ignore the potential need for continuity for children who come from other programs. Our site visitors' ratings suggest that the best continuity for children from an external preschool occurs in Bear Valley, a school that does **not** have preschool in the elementary school building. Both the local Head Start and elementary school have independently developed developmental programs that are highly responsive to the needs of children and families. Continuity can exist, then, without coordination and communication, particularly when curriculum and parent involvement approaches are congruent. One might question, however, whether such continuity would continue over time if the leadership in either program were to change.

Some of the reasons given by site visitors for the ratings are also interesting for our understanding of influences on continuity. In Hillside, continuity for children from the nearby Head Start operated by another agency is fairly high, but only because there happen to be classrooms that are relatively developmentally appropriate in both Head Start and kindergarten; there is no conscious coordination to produce this. In Pioneer Primary School, curriculum is again important, with the High/Scope curriculum seen as primarily responsible for the continuity that does exist for children attending preschool in the building.

Global Continuity

The earlier analysis of continuity makes it clear that a single rating of the degree of continuity experienced by all entering kindergartners is not very meaningful. But perhaps it is possible to characterize what the school is doing. Site visitors while on site had rated various potential influences on continuity using a "site visitor rating scale." This scale consisted of a large number of dimensions related to preschool and kindergarten programming and to provisions for continuity. Five of the items indicate how well continuity is being implemented in a global sense and emphasize a different dimension than we have discussed so far:

> How committed are preschool teachers to continuity?
> How committed are kindergarten teachers to continuity?
> How committed are district administrators to continuity?
> How committed is the principal to continuity?
> How institutionalized is continuity?

The average ratings across the five items for each site (1 = low, 3 = high) group the sites into three categories:

- High -- Seaview, Pioneer
- Medium -- Plainville, Bear Valley, Southside
- Low -- Hillside, Westside, Lakeside

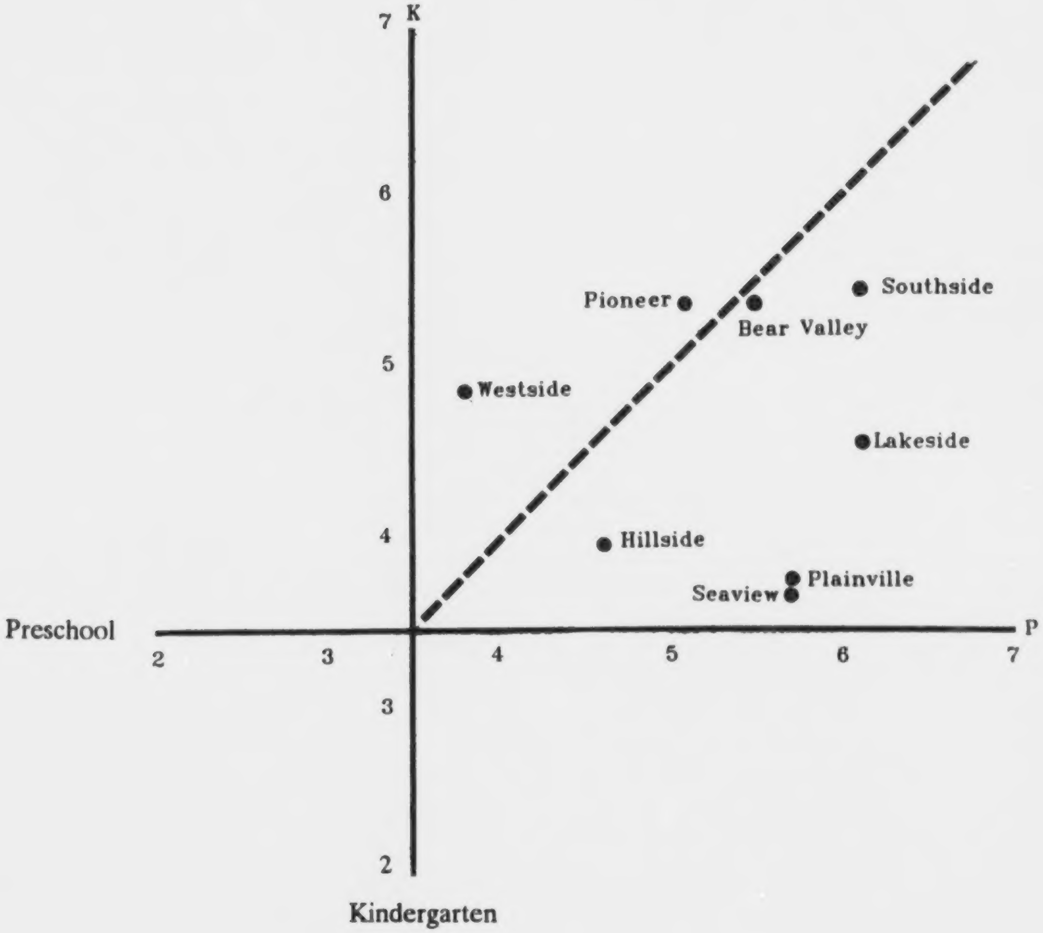
It is interesting to note that Bear Valley, with no preschool program in the school, is in the same category with Plainville and Southside that have school-based preschools, further supporting the findings with respect to location of preschools.

Influence of Curriculum

Many writers have noted the importance of the preschool and kindergarten curricula for the continuity experience of children (e.g., Kagan, 1990). As noted in Chapter II, we obtained a self-report assessment of the nature of the kindergarten curriculum through the school survey. During the site visits, however, we conducted half-day observations in most of the kindergarten classrooms in the schools visited and in many of the preschool programs that feed into those kindergartens. We used the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale or ECERS (Harms & Clifford, 1980) at both levels, using an adaptation for kindergarten created by the ECERS developers for a North Carolina Study (Bryant, Clifford, & Peisner, 1989). The ECERS contains 37 items that rate various aspects of classroom routines, furnishings, language and reasoning experiences, motor and creative activities, and social development using 7-point rating scales. For this analysis we simply averaged all items to obtain a single score for each classroom. It is common in the literature to describe the average ECERS score as an indicator of the classroom's developmental appropriateness, where a score of 5 is considered "good."

We found considerable between- and within-site variation in classroom scores, but for the purpose of characterizing the curricular continuity experienced by the children in each site, we aggregated all the preschool classes to compare with the average of all kindergarten classes at the school. In general, preschool classrooms score higher on developmental appropriateness than the kindergarten classrooms, but this is not true at all sites. In Seaview and Plainville, for example, the preschool ratings are almost two scale points higher than the kindergarten, whereas in Westside, the kindergarten is somewhat more developmentally appropriate than the preschool from which the children come. Figure IV-3 displays the relationship between preschool and kindergarten ECERS scores in a way that shows the developmental appropriateness of the preschool classes, the developmental appropriateness of the kindergartens, and the similarity or consistency between the two.

Figure IV-3: ***Relation Between Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) Ratings in Preschool and Kindergarten Classes of Indepth Study Sites***



The further to the right a site is in Figure IV-3, the more developmentally appropriate its preschool classes are; the higher the site on the vertical axis, the more developmentally appropriate its kindergarten(s). The closer to the diagonal a site is, the greater the consistency in preschool-kindergarten approaches. Southside and Lakeside have identical preschool ECERS ratings but different (and lower) kindergarten ratings; Southside shows a higher degree of curricular continuity. Southside and Hillside schools are the same distance from the diagonal, suggesting that they share the same degree of consistency between the program approaches in preschool and kindergarten, yet Southside shows a much higher degree of overall developmental appropriateness.

We find virtually no relationship between curricular continuity (Figure IV-3) and our site visitors' global ratings described earlier. For example, although Pioneer appears high in global continuity and also shows high curricular consistency, Seaview is high on global continuity but very low (relative to other sites) in curricular continuity. Clearly, commitment to continuity is not always sufficient to create curricular continuity for all children. A single teacher not fully committed to the school's philosophy, or the conditions of one inadequately supplied classroom, can alter the average curricular continuity for a school.

Focusing only on curricular consistency (although ECERS ratings do constitute a broad definition of curriculum), we see that children at Pioneer and Bear Valley experience the greatest continuity even though their preschool experience is generally not as developmentally appropriate as that in several other schools. It is interesting to speculate as to whether the discontinuity found in Westside and Hillside (both about the same distance from the diagonal) is experienced differently by children because in Westside developmental appropriateness improves going from preschool into kindergarten while in Hillside the ratings decline. As one of the teachers we interviewed said, "continuity means having a developmentally appropriate program."

Is Developmental Appropriateness in Kindergarten a Substitute for Continuity?

Up to this point our analyses have been aimed at understanding influences on the continuity experienced by children (or the efforts of schools to create continuity). It seems reasonable to go the next step and ask what the best experience for children would be if schools and preschools were unable to create curricular continuity. The emphasis on developmentally appropriate practice in recent years (e.g., Bredekamp, 1987; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1990) suggests a solution: schools implementing developmentally appropriate kindergartens are providing a better experience for children, regardless of the children's prekindergarten experience. Thus, we might speculate that when preschool and kindergarten approaches are not continuous (as in Westside and Hillside mentioned above), the Westside children are better off because their kindergarten is more developmental. On the basis of this argument, it would be important to understand factors associated with developmental appropriateness in kindergarten.

We know from the analysis in Chapter II that children are somewhat more likely to have a developmentally appropriate kindergarten experience if they attend a low-poverty school, i.e., one in which children of low income families constitute 25% or less of the school enrollment. Thus, children are more likely to have a positive transition into lower-poverty schools.

To investigate other predictors of the nature of the kindergarten program, we entered nine variables into stepwise regressions predicting the two program factors -- developmental and academic. Three variables, accounting for 13% of the variance, produced the best model predicting the developmental factor. Kindergartens tend to be more developmental when (a) schools provide more parent involvement activities, (b) classes have lower staff/child ratios (fewer children per adult), and (c) schools do not routinely test kindergarten children.

Four variables best predicted the academic factor, indicating that kindergartens are more academic when (a) they serve higher proportions of low-income children, (b) the schools provide fewer parent involvement opportunities, (c) smaller percentages of children are placed in transition classes, and (d) the schools routinely test kindergarten children.

School Climate

In both of the regression analyses described earlier, the first school climate factor appears as one of the predictors of transition activities. In designing the survey we focused on that aspect of climate that deals with school staff's perceptions of their students and parents. Although the relation between climate and transition activities is not strong, climate is the strongest predictor of parent involvement in transition. We also found that there are differences in school climate depending on whether a prekindergarten program is located in the school. If it is, schools show more favorable ratings on the climate factor that reflects greater appreciation of the value of early childhood education. These schools also exhibit higher expectations for the achievement of low-income children.

We turn now to our site visit experience to see whether there is any evidence that the attitudes of school staff toward parents influence the continuity experienced by children. First, we present evidence related to school leadership (since the leaders set the tone and attitudes for other staff) and then specifically examine staff attitudes toward parents and corresponding parent attitudes toward school.

Leadership Influences

If the survey analyses provide only weak evidence of a relationship between overall school climate and school transition activities, there is substantial evidence from the site visits on how leadership can influence continuity.

Leadership appears to be important in the schools we visited because it determines the nature and philosophy of the curriculum and creates coordinated teams of supportive staff, i.e., the context for school climate.

At Seaview Magnet School, which received the highest global continuity rating, the school superintendent has focused on early childhood education in his long-range planning; he is interested in expanding the program to other schools. The district curriculum director has a strong knowledge of early childhood research. The principal is a former kindergarten teacher who is committed to a strong early childhood program that includes both the preschool and kindergarten levels. At the site of Pioneer Primary School, leadership and curriculum are intertwined. The superintendent mandated the High/Scope program at both preschool and kindergarten, and is strongly supported by the principal in this approach. In both Seaview and Pioneer, administrators at both the district and school level have taken a personal interest in defining continuity at the school and have assumed direct responsibility for implementing the vision.

Plainville also has district and school level support for extending developmentally appropriate practice into kindergarten and first grade as a rather direct result of becoming one of the few schools in their part of the state with a state-supported preschool, one mandating a developmental approach. Both the superintendent and principal have attended state-level training sessions, have become active in the regional Association for the Education of Young Children, and have worked together with the administrative assistant responsible for the new program in developing a plan to educate kindergarten and primary teachers, as well as parents, in the value of developmental education for young children.

The Bear Valley School principal provides strong leadership for her teachers and believes in the NAEYC guidelines. She provides staff with extra services and constant support, and has convinced the central administration to target Bear Valley School for extra services for at-risk children. As one teacher said, "We are fortunate that we have a principal who has gotten services for our kids." This leadership and commitment may have led to the relatively high rating on global commitment to continuity, even though there is no preschool in the building. The Southside principal has an early childhood background, provides extensive inservice training for teachers, and has received the full support of the district superintendent for his program. The principal, with district support, was instrumental in developing the plan for the early childhood center, one built upon a coordinated preschool to grade 2 curriculum with a strong emphasis on parent involvement. The district has provided support, but leadership is at the school level. Strong school-based leadership also exists in Westside where the assistant principal, with an early childhood background, works with teachers, parents and social services to create continuity for children from the time they enter kindergarten.

Leadership at Hillside is shared between a district-level director for the Migrant Head Start and the elementary school principal. While the programs are located in the same building, it is the migrant director who holds the vision of what continuity should look like in Hillside and works with her staff in developing transition activities to implement such continuity. The principal is supportive of the migrant program but does not assume any of the responsibility himself, nor does he initiate any transition activities. In contrast to the other sites where at least the school administrator plays an active role in promoting continuity, the Lakeside School administration had a role in establishing the steering committee that comprises the network, but is otherwise not seen (by teachers) as strong or supportive.

Attitudes Toward Parents

Parents, like children, experience a transition in their roles and expectations when their children go from preschool to kindergarten, a transition that when effectively facilitated strengthens the school program and benefits children, parents, and schools. As noted earlier, the provision of parent involvement activities by the schools is one of the better predictors of school transition efforts. Parent involvement, while recognized as important, however, is not always regarded as a mechanism of continuity and integrated into a plan of transition activities designed to promote continuity.

Sites vary in whether they see parents as active contributors to the educational process or as additional "students" in need of specific skills before they can help their children. Westside, Seaview, and Bear Valley all rely heavily on parents as partners in educating children. An array of training opportunities, support services, and open communication exists in these schools. Comments about parents include:

- "Many do not have a lot of education but are keenly aware of the importance of education. They're not articulate at meetings but willing to spend time in school."

- "Parents are the core, school is supplemental. Parents who can't read are our strongest supporters."

In sites where parent involvement is defined more narrowly in terms of volunteering in class and where few parents participate, as in Lakeside, attitudes toward parents reflect a more passive role: "They really don't know what kids can do. Most parents go along with the program we suggest."

All of the sites visited have large numbers of low-income families among their school population, and many of these families are considered by teachers and school personnel as "hard to reach." Because of the high poverty levels, the problems associated with disadvantaged children and their families are not unfamiliar to teachers and administrators. Factors that are viewed as barriers to effective parent involvement for this population are not alike, however. Some of the barriers are seen as problems within the parents themselves while others are viewed as situational or environmental factors. Illiteracy or lack of skills was viewed as a barrier by staff in Pioneer and Southside. A related factor, parents' negative feelings about school resulting from their own negative school experiences, was cited by teachers in Plainville and Bear Valley as a problem.

Family dysfunction is said to contribute to parents being hard to reach in half of our sites, with addiction problems seen as particularly critical in two communities. Three schools find problems related to abuse and neglect a barrier to working with parents effectively. The nature of transition activities developed by schools to aid parents in becoming more involved in their children's education will stem, in part, from staff's perceptions of parents as being capable of being partners with the schools. Schools such as Bear Valley recognize the barriers many low-income parents face when working with schools but persist in providing skill training and support for parents to develop the confidence necessary to become active partners.

For example, providing free lunch and childcare for parents attending parenting classes and volunteering in class is viewed as a means of building partnerships. In other schools where parents are viewed by at least some staff as lacking the skills to help their children, the school's role becomes one of instructor rather than partner, and parents report feeling unwelcomed by kindergarten staff.

Many parents from low-income homes have developed roles supportive of the school through their involvement with the preschool programs their children attended. Through home visits, parent education opportunities, volunteering in class, becoming involved in policy and advocacy activities, etc., many parents have become enculturated in partnership roles with schools. Schools with similar approaches to parent involvement can then build upon what began in preschool. For parents whose children have not participated in such preschools or were not engaged actively by the preschools, schools face a different set of challenges. If schools persist in only offering a narrow set of options for parents to become involved, those who do not participate may be regarded by school personnel as "difficult parents." For those schools who recognize the need to provide basic services in the way many quality preschools do, even the "hard to reach" parents can become partners. In Bear Valley, where many of the parents of kindergarten children have their first experience (as parents) with formal education when children enter kindergarten, schools take an active role in coordinating with social services and providing family support.

In conclusion, it is difficult to discern a clear association between school personnel attitudes toward parents and the quality of continuity experienced by children. We can say, however, that there is considerable variation in how parents are viewed by school staff and that this undoubtedly affects the experiences that children and parents have as they begin their public school experience. The leadership shown by school and district administrators may be related to these attitudes.

Summary: Influences on Continuity and Transition

Although the highlights at the beginning of this chapter suggest that a number of important factors in schools are associated with greater degrees of emphasis on transition activities and continuity, taken as a whole the data from surveys and site visits show considerable ambiguity. For example, location of the preschool is important, but it doesn't guarantee continuity; location in the school is, however, generally associated with more transition activities and the involvement of preschool staff in those activities. In some cases where schools operate in the same building with the kindergartens, there is close coordination of curriculum, parent involvement, and other activities that contribute to continuity; in other cases, proximity seems to breed complacency and the assumption that special efforts are unnecessary. It may be that it is not so important whether there is a preschool in the school but what proportion of entering kindergartners come from that preschool.

Although we have learned about characteristics and activities of schools that are associated with the degree to which schools use transition activities, what is ultimately important is the continuity experienced by children. We have learned much less about that, but have some ideas from site visits. As a way of reviewing the complexity of the relations between continuity and curriculum, leadership, attitudes toward parents, and location, Table IV-1 summarizes the situation at each site on these factors. Each of the major influences displayed in Table IV-1 is discussed below.

Developmental Appropriateness

Developmental appropriateness is an important concept. Curricular continuity can, by definition, constitute the critical basis of continuity for children. In some cases, great effort has been shown by both preschool and school staffs to create coordinated, continuous curricula; in other schools, children experience a consistent curricular approach simply because they happen to have attended a preschool program whose approach is congruent with the kindergarten's. In the absence of continuity, we propose that providing developmentally appropriate kindergartens is a way for schools to enhance the early schooling experience of children, regardless of their prekindergarten experience. The survey data suggest that currently, schools with developmentally appropriate kindergartens are those serving primarily higher-income children, providing more parent involvement opportunities, having lower (better) staff/child ratios, and those doing less routine testing of kindergarten children.

Leadership and Commitment to Transition

The degree of commitment to transition varies across sites. In all schools, the principal is influential in promoting continuity as defined by the school. In the two sites with highest scores for global continuity, district administrators actively support the approach to continuity at the school level. In one of these schools it was the superintendent who mandated use of the coordinated curriculum between preschool and kindergarten, and in the other school, the

Table IV-1: Influences on Continuity

School	**Global Continuity** (Site Visitor Rating Scale)	**Curricular Continuity** (ECERS)	**Kindergarten Developmental Appropriateness** (ECERS)	**Leadership** (Interviews, Survey)	**Attitudes Toward Parents** (Interviews, Survey)	**% of Children From Inschool Preschool** (Survey)
Seaview	High	Low	Low	School superintendent focuses on early childhood in long-range planning and in replicating Seaview model in other schools. District curriculum director has strong early childhood knowledge.	Heavy reliance on parents as partners in education of children.	98%
Pioneer Valley	High	High	High	Superintendent mandated same developmentally appropriate curriculum at prekindergarten and kindergarten. Strong support of principal.	Low parent literacy and geographical distance from school seen as barriers. Higher parent involvement at prekindergarten (staff makes home visits) than in kindergarten.	50%
Plainville	Medium	Low	Low	Superintendent and principal recently shifted focus from academic to developmental kindergarten, based on developmental prek program funded by state.	Some parents seen as having negative feelings about school. Informal communication between parents and staff occur in the community.	63%
Bear Valley	Medium	High	High	Principal is strong leader, believes in NAEYC guidelines.	Support services are provided to assist parents in becoming active partners with schools.	0%
Southside	Medium	Medium	High	Principal has early childhood background. Principal provides extensive inservice training. Principal has full support of superintendent.	Low parent literacy seen as barrier. Despite policies (e.g., mandatory parent involvement at preschool), parents viewed as not having time to be involved. Parent coordinator on staff to help parents become more involved.	48%
Hillside	Low	Medium	Low	School principal supportive but not involved.	Staff see their role as giving parents tools to become supportive of school. "They don't know how to help."	47%
Westside	Low	Medium	Medium	Asst. Principal provides strong teacher support for developmental kindergarten, and services for families coordinated with social services.	Heavy reliance on parents as partners in education of children.	0%
Lakeside	Low	Low	Medium	School principal had role in establishing network, but not ongoing support.	Most parents go along with programs suggested for them.	24%

superintendent holds up the school with the prekindergarten-grade 6 block as a model for other schools to replicate. In contrast, in the two schools where the school principal has had little input in conceptualizing continuity at the school or in implementing the transition activities designed to promote it, global continuity ratings are low. The survey data show a strong influence of leadership on the existence of higher-order transition activities designed to promote continuity. Schools where a district or school person has designated responsibilities for transition are the schools in which coordination and communication with preschools are likely to occur.

Attitude Towards Parents

Survey findings do not specifically address how attitudes toward parents affect children's experience of continuity. Assuming that transition activities can promote continuity, attitudes towards parents (as measured by our school climate factor) do indeed influence the extent to which schools initiate transition activities. We also know that poverty level is related to attitudes toward parents, with high-poverty schools having a lower score on this climate measure. No clear pattern emerged from the site visits on how attitudes toward parents affect continuity, but we assume that working with parents at the time of their children's transition may ease the transition for the children. The two schools without preschools take the most active role in preparing parents to work with schools, seeing this focus as central to their approach to continuity while also being integrated with community support services. When schools provide services such as free lunch and childcare for younger children, parents in need of training can participate. Parents involved with the two magnet schools know from the beginning that a high level of parent involvement is expected. To overcome low parental literacy and lack of transportation, one school provides a home-school coordinator to work with parents and the other provides bus tokens for parents to use in coming to school. In the rural schools, geographical distance from school presents a barrier to parental participation. Staff in these schools make home visits, particularly at the preschool level, in order to build rapport with families. In the migrant program, parents of preschool children are trained to be advocates for their children when they enter kindergarten. Parents are viewed as wanting to help but needing the appropriate tools to do so. Only in one of the schools are parents viewed as passive supporters of the existing programs.

Percent of Children Entering Kindergarten From Inschool Preschool

The impact of location and the associated transition activities on children's experience of continuity may depend more on the percentage of children entering kindergarten from the inhouse preschool than on either the existence of a preschool or coordinated activities of staff. If a small percentage of children experience high continuity through the focus of the school's coordination efforts while most children experience discontinuity with little effort to ease their transition, the exclusive school focus on coordinating preschool (in school) and kindergarten may actually widen the gap between children coming from the school and those from home or community programs.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions About Transition and Continuity
Conclusions About the Public Schools in Which These Transition Activities Occur
Implications for Policy and Practice
Recommendations for Further Research

V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In the first part of this chapter we present our conclusions from the transition study, summarizing the major findings about the prevalence of transition activities in U.S. schools and the characteristics of schools that relate to the extent of transition and continuity. The second part summarizes what has been learned about the kindergarten and prekindergarten experience of children in these schools. In the third part of the chapter we derive implications that these findings have for public policy and educational practice. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research.

Conclusions About Transition and Continuity

Prevalence of Transition Activities

After assessing the extent of a variety of transition activities, we must conclude that transition activities are not commonplace in our nation's schools. Twenty-one percent of districts report a "wide range" of transition activities, and schools rarely practice more than a few of the many possible transition activities. For example, 10% of schools report systematic communication between kindergarten teachers and all previous caregivers or teachers about the entering kindergarten children; 12% of schools have kindergarten curricula designed to build on the preschool program; and 47% of schools have a formal program for school visitations by parents.

This relatively low emphasis on transition may relate to the belief of school personnel that most children do not have much difficulty adjusting to kindergarten. Where problems do occur, however, adjusting to the academic demands of kindergarten is seen as the area of greatest difficulty, and more children are seen as having adjustment problems if they are entering high-poverty schools.

Transition activities have achieved the status of formal policy in only 13% of the schools. While written policies are only a beginning, their presence may indicate the value school leaders place on transition. Schools are also not very likely to evaluate their transition activities.

Transition activities fall into two distinct categories -- those that involve coordination or communication between school and preschool levels and those that in one way or another include parents as participants. The former are in many ways more difficult to implement and are less common. We find only limited efforts underway in the following areas:

- coordinating prekindergarten and kindergarten curricula;

- establishing communication between staffs at both levels, either about the entering students or about their respective instructional programs; and

- providing joint training for staffs from both levels.

The easier-to-implement activities (those that generally involve parents in some way) occur more widely. They include such efforts as:

- welcoming incoming children and their parents with special orientations and visitations (81% of schools report that at least half of incoming children and parents visit their new school before the school year begins);

- informing parents of entering students about their rights and responsibilities in the school; and

- involving parents in classroom activities to facilitate a smooth transition.

Characteristics of Schools Associated With the Extent of Transition Activities

Three characteristics of schools were explored: the presence of a prekindergarten program in the school, the poverty level of the families served by the school, and the size of the school.

The presence of a prekindergarten program within the school building (e.g., a state preschool, local day care program, Head Start, or special education program) makes a difference in how prevalent various transition activities are. When there is a prekindergarten program in the school, we find a greater degree of:

- transfer of records from the prekindergarten program to kindergarten;

- communication between kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers about students;

- communication between teachers at the two levels about curriculum issues;

- coordination of the two instructional programs; and

- participation of prekindergarten program staff in transition activities such as joint workshops, sharing information, assisting children with adjustment problems, and preparing individual children and parents for the transition.

The type of transition activity relates to the proportion of children from low-income families in the school:

- There are more transition activities involving coordination and communication between preschool and school levels in high-poverty schools.
- There are more transition activities that involve parents in low-poverty schools.

It may be that high-poverty schools, in spite of their many challenges, have resources through Chapter 1, state funds for at-risk children, or other programs that facilitate this coordination and communication. These schools also have more children from Head Start programs, which may have initiated transition activities.

Although the size of the school is not a consistent factor, the size of the district is, with 84% of large, compared with 60% of small, districts having at least some transition activities.

Conditions that Relate to Continuity for Children

There are a number of conditions in the schools that are associated with greater transition efforts and the resultant continuity: (a) administrative support and leadership, (b) a school climate that includes positive attitudes toward children and parents, (c) structural connections between prekindergarten and kindergarten programs, and (d) the general poverty level of the families whose children are enrolled in the school.

a. Administrative support and leadership: Schools have more coordination and communication with preschools when school staff are assigned the responsibility for the transition activities. In the site visits, we observed that a district or school administrator has greater influence over schoolwide transition activities than do individual teachers.

b. School climate: There is more coordination and communication between levels when school personnel exhibit more positive attitudes toward children and parents.

c. Structural arrangements: Overall there is little coordination and communication. However, having a preschool program located in the school increases the chances that there will be some coordination and communication between levels and more involvement of preschool staff in transition activities. At the same time, our site visits demonstrated that the presence of a preschool program in the school is no guarantee of greater transition efforts or continuity.

d. Poverty level of the school: Higher levels of coordination and communication between prekindergarten and kindergarten exist in high-poverty schools. This provides the potential for creating greater continuity for children.

Conclusions About the Public Schools in Which These Transition Activities Occur

Typical Prekindergarten Experience

It is estimated that 40% of children entering public school have some type of formal program experience in the year preceding kindergarten. Prekindergartens are located in about 27% of the schools. Most school-based prekindergartens allow all age-eligible children to attend, although federal and state-supported programs often have additional enrollment criteria such as family income, performance on some sort of screening test, or a handicapping condition of the child, and 83% of the 4-year-olds in public school-based prekindergartens are in Chapter 1, Head Start, special education, or state or locally funded programs. Day care programs are least likely to have entry criteria other than age.

Over two-thirds of the school-based preschool programs assess children with standardized tests, screening, or readiness instruments. Most of these programs provide a variety of parent involvement opportunities.

Difficulties Adjusting to Kindergarten

School personnel believe that most children do not have much difficulty adjusting to kindergarten, but, where problems occur, adjusting to the academic demands of kindergarten is seen as the area of greatest difficulty. More children are seen as having adjustment problems if they are entering high-poverty schools.

The Nature of Public School Kindergarten Programs

The "typical" kindergarten program in our public schools is a half-day program that enrolls 69 children, with a staff-child ratio of 1:16. Fifty-eight percent of the children are in half-day programs, 37% are in full-day, and 5% are in classes meeting less frequently. Children in 82% of the schools are routinely tested with standardized tests, screening, or readiness instruments for such purposes as individualizing instruction, determining program eligibility, referring to special education, and making placement decisions (retention, transition class).

More than half the schools (61%) retain children in kindergarten (although, on average, these schools retain only 5.3% of the children enrolled in kindergarten). About 23% of schools have transition classes which provide an extra year of schooling after kindergarten. Schools with transition classes assign 13% of their kindergartners to them as an alternative to first-grade placement. In total, 72% of public schools either retain children in kindergarten, place them in transitional classes, or do both.

Although the average kindergarten classroom describes itself as developmental, it blends academic strategies, such as worksheets, basal readers, and large-group instruction, with developmental approaches such as learning centers, small-group projects and the involvement of children in establishing rules. In general, allowing children to select their own learning activities -- a hallmark of developmentally appropriate practice -- is reported as less likely to occur than any of the other developmental strategies.

Almost all schools provide opportunities for parent involvement at the kindergarten level. The most common opportunities are classroom volunteering (offered in 78% of the schools), learning activities for parents to do with their children at home (56% of schools), and parent education workshops (37%). Parents have fewer opportunities to be involved in school policies and operations; about one-third of schools have parents directly participating in setting school goals, long-range school planning, or parent involvement policies. Less than 15% of the schools have kindergarten parents who help set policies on kindergarten retention, select their child's teacher, or choose the school their child will attend.

Several characteristics of public school kindergarten programs are associated with the poverty level of the school, including length of day, staff-child ratio, parent education and parent involvement, developmental appropriateness, retention practices, assessment practices, and reliance on extra-year programs. In fact, the influence of poverty level is so dramatic that one cannot begin to think about the continuity experiences in schools without taking it into account.

Among the many distinguishing characteristics of high-poverty schools are the prevalence of school based, federally- or state-funded preschools, unique patterns of parent education (e.g., programs that include home visits, involvement in certain school policies), greater use of academic instructional practices, more assessment of preschool children, and more use of transition classes and kindergarten retention. High-poverty schools also report more full-day kindergartens, more problems on the part of children adjusting to school, and less positive attitudes toward parents and children than do moderate- or low-poverty schools.

School size is also related to important features of kindergartens, with small schools being more likely to have an academic focus and a favorable staff/child ratio. Small schools are less likely to have school-based prekindergartens, operate full-day kindergartens, assess entering children, or foster parent involvement. Small schools are also less likely to use transition classes and retention, but if they do, they retain more or place more children in transition classes.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Based on information collected in the study, we draw three major implications for early childhood program policies and practices.

There is no single way to implement transition activities that will be appropriate for all schools. Our surveys and site visits show considerable variation in the types of transition activities implemented by public schools as well as a wide range of factors that influence the extent to which they occur. We also know that children entering public school kindergartens have diverse prior experiences, vary greatly in the extent of their difficulty adjusting to kindergarten, and in fact enter very different kinds of kindergarten programs. In some schools most of the kindergartners will come from a school-based preschool, whereas in other schools most children will have their prekindergarten experience in other settings. Furthermore, schools differ in the resources (space, staff, funding) that can be marshalled to aid transition efforts. These findings suggest that there can be no single recipe for creating continuity, but that different transition activities will be appropriate in different circumstances. This report has described a number of approaches to implementing transitions that may be useful for schools and preschools to consider.

Schools serving higher proportions of students from low-income families may need to exert special efforts to create preschool-kindergarten continuity. We found that, in a number of ways, high-poverty schools are implementing important transition activities: they are more likely, for example, to implement those activities that involve preschool-kindergarten coordination and communication (e.g., kindergarten-preschool teacher communication about children, and transfer of records from preschool to kindergarten). Although this provides the potential for creating greater continuity for children, as suggested above, there are other features of the high-poverty schools that lead us to expect that their transition activities will require greater effort: Incoming children are judged to have greater difficulty adjusting to kindergarten, and entering kindergartners are less likely to have been enrolled in a prekindergarten program (preschool, day care, etc.). High-poverty schools have a greater academic focus in kindergarten, and they are more likely to create an extra year through kindergarten retention or placement of children in transition classes. Furthermore, transition activities that involve parents are less common in high-poverty schools. Thus, new strategies for reaching low-income parents may be necessary.

School staff need a clearer understanding of developmentally appropriate practice. Most schools consider their kindergarten programs to be "developmental," yet they rate themselves relatively low on some of the key classroom activities that early childhood educators define as developmental practice. Research on children's learning, as well as the recommendations of a number of national organizations, suggests the importance of developmentally appropriate practice and discourages grade retention and extra-year programs for young children. The National Governors' Association's strategies for achieving the national education goals include developmentally appropriate preschool programs and age-appropriate expectations and activities in kindergarten. If school administrators and teachers believe they have already adopted a developmental orientation, they are less likely to see the need to change, yet their self-reports suggest that there is a considerable gap between classroom practice and the strategies needed for achieving quality kindergartens.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study is just a beginning, providing a profile of public school kindergartens and transition activities through which schools attempt to smooth children's transition into kindergarten. Much remains to be learned. We need to learn more about the full range and diversity of children's program experience prior to kindergarten. Another U.S. Department of Education study has recently provided national data on the variety of programs serving preschool children in this country (Kisker, Hofferth, Phillips, & Farquhar, 1991), but beyond that, we need to know more about the patterns of articulation for individual children as they move from home and preschool to kindergarten. Efforts of prekindergarten programs to enhance the transition experience for children should also be studied.

Most importantlty, we need to study the impact of this transition on children. In particular, research is needed on how discontinuity between preschool and kindergarten affects young children's development and school success, and what the differential effects of various approaches to transition and continuity are. Finally, if it is true, as suggested by some of our observations, that the transition from kindergarten to first grade is critical for children's school success, the nature and impact of that transition should be investigated.

REFERENCES

Administration for Children, Youth and Families. (1991, April). Availability of funds for Head Start/public school early childhood transition demonstrations. Washington, DC: Department of Health and Human Services, ACYF Information Memorandum.

Administration for Children, Youth and Families. (n.d.). Easing the transition from preschool to kindergarten: A guide for early childhood teachers and administrators. (Pamphlet) Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Bredekamp, S. (Ed.). (1987). Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Brookover, W.B., Beady, C., Flood, P., Schweitzer, J., & Wisenbaker, J. (1979). School social systems and student achievement: Schools can make a difference. New York: Praeger.

Bryant, D.M., Clifford, R.M. & Peisner, E.S. (1989, March). Best practices for beginners: Quality programs for kindergartners. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.

Burts, D.C., Hart, C.H., Charlesworth, R., & Kirk, L. (1990). A comparison of frequencies of stress behaviors observed in kindergarten children in classrooms with developmentally appropriate versus developmentally inappropriate instructional practices. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 5(3), 407-423.

Connecticut State Department of Education. (1984). Handbook for use of the Connecticut school effectiveness interview and questionnaire. Hartford, CT: Author.

Eberts, R.W., Kehoe, E., & Stone, J.A. (1984). The effect of school size on student outcomes (Final Report). Eugene, OR: Center for Educational Policy and Management, Oregon University (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 245 382).

Edmunds, R. (1979). Effective schools for the urban poor. Educational Leadership, 37(1), 15-27.

Fowler, W.J., Jr., & Walberg, H.J. (1991). School size, characteristics, and outcomes. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 13(2), 189-202.

Freeman, E.B., & Hatch, J.A. (1989). What schools expect young children to know and do: An analysis of kindergarten report cards. Elementary School Journal, 89, 595-605.

Goodson, B.D., Swartz, J.P., & Millsap, M.A. (1991). Working with families: Promising programs to help parents support young children's learning. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Griswold, P.A., Cotton, K.J., & Hansen, J.B. (nd.) Effective compensatory education sourcebook, Vol. I: A review of effective educational practices. Washington, DC: US Department of Education.

Harms, T., & Clifford, R. (1980). Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hitz, R. & Wright, D. (1988, May) Kindergarten issues: A practitioners' survey. Principal, 67(5), 28-30.

Howley, C. B. (1989, May). What is the effect of small-scale schooling on student achievement? ERIC Digest EDO-RC-89-6. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

Kagan, S.L. (In Press). Moving from here to there: Rethinking continuity and transitions in early care and education. In B. Spodek & O. Saracho (Eds.), Yearbook in early childhood education: Volume II. New York: Teachers College Press.

Karweit, N. (1988, May). A research study: Effective pre-primary programs and practices. Principal, 67(5), 18-21.

Kennedy, M.M., Jung, R.K., & Orland, M.E. (1986, January). Poverty, achievement, and the distribution of compensatory education services. (Interim Report from the National Assessment of Chapter 1.) Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Kisker, E.E., Hofferth, S.L., Phillips, D.A., & Farquhar, E. (1991). A profile of child care settings: Early education and care in 1990. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Knapp, M.S., & Turnbull, B.J. (1990). Better schooling for the children of poverty: Alternatives to conventional wisdom, Volume I: Summary. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International and Policy Studies Associates.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1984). Accreditation criteria and procedures of the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

National Association of Elementary School Principals (1990). Standards for quality programs for young children: Early childhood education and the elementary school principals. Alexandria, VA: Author.

National Association of State Boards of Education. (1988). Right from the start: The report of the NASBE task force on early childhood education. Washington, DC: Author.

National Governors' Association (1990). *Educating America: State strategies for achieving the national education goals*. Report of the task force on education. Washington, DC: Author.

Perrone, V. (1988). The "discovery" of the early years. In L.J. Schweinhart & L. dePietro (Eds.), *Shaping the future for early childhood programs*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Early Childhood Policy Papers, No.7.

Purkey, S.C., & Smith, M.S. (1982, February). Effective Schools: A Review. Paper presented at National Institute of Education conference on the implications of research on teaching for practice, Warrenton, Virginia.

Schweinhart, L.J. (1988). How policymakers can deliver high-quality early childhood programs. Paper prepared for the Early Childhood Task Force of the National Association of State Boards of Education.

Walberg, H.J., & Fowler, W.J., Jr. (1987). Expenditure and size efficiencies of public school districts. *Educational Researcher*, *16*(7), 5-13.

APPENDIX A: SELECTED LITERATURE REVIEW:

RESEARCH RELEVANT TO THE STUDY OF TRANSITION

National and State Initiatives

Local Program Evaluations

Issues Related to School Readiness

APPENDIX A: SELECTED LITERATURE REVIEW: RESEARCH RELEVANT TO THE STUDY OF TRANSITION

There has been little research on the transition between preschool and elementary school. There has been extensive research, however, on a multitude of programs for disadvantaged children -- preschool education, compensatory education, home-based approaches, day care, parent and family education, Head Start, Follow Through, bilingual education, migrant education, and so forth. Not all findings are congruent, but many studies find at least short-term effects and there is accumulating evidence of long-term benefits from some efforts, such as comprehensive, intensive preschool programs for disadvantaged children.

In defining program elements to study in relation to the transition into kindergarten, we have relied on experience from a number of areas: (a) research on effective preschool programs, (b) research on effective elementary school programs, (c) evidence about the elements of quality programs at both the elementary and preschool levels, and (d) experience from the few existing systematic efforts to create and study preschool-kindergarten transition.

The review is divided into three parts: the first summarizes selected national, and state-level initiatives to systematically create and study preschool-kindergarten transition; the second part summarizes selected local projects; and the third briefly reviews issues related to school readiness, specifically schools' use of retention and extra-year programs.

National and State Initiatives

In the early 1960's, a number of preschool intervention programs began and were beginning to report their successes. These included such programs as the Perry Preschool Project (Weikart, et al., 1967); the Children's Center in Syracuse, New York (Caldwell & Richmond, 1968); and Susan Gray's (1967) Early Training Project. These were shortly followed by Head Start in 1965, which has now been providing comprehensive programming for over 25 years.

Although a number of studies have shown a "drop off" in the immediate cognitive gains found for children participating in Head Start or other preschool programs (e.g., McKey, et al., 1985), a few other studies now show long-term benefits (Ramey & Campbell, 1987; Weikart, 1989). Furthermore, the benefits demonstrated by these programs are extensive. They include immediate gains in performance on norm-referenced tests of "IQ" and some social behavior ratings; intermediate-range improvements in performance on standardized achievement tests in reading and mathematics, decreased percentages of children "held back" or retained in grade, and lessened chances of being assigned to special education classes. A limited number of longitudinal studies have also documented long-range reductions in crime and delinquency, decreased welfare dependency, increased employment and earnings, and decreased teenage pregnancy rates. For a number of these benefits, economists have calculated dollar values, thereby adding the cost-benefit of the programs to the individual and social benefits listed: "Early intervention for disadvantaged children can yield an economic return that makes it a good investment relative to other uses of society's resources" (Barnett & Escobar, 1987, p. 407).

Follow Through

Soon after Head Start began, educators and child development experts raised concerns about retaining the hoped-for benefits. In 1967, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) launched Follow Through, a K-3 school-based program designed to build upon the gains made by children in Head Start. Although focused on alternative educational models to enhance the educational achievement of economically disadvantaged children, Follow Through was never large by Head Start standards (Hodges, et al., 1980).

Even though "transition" was never an explicit element, Follow Through model sponsors developed articulated curricula that spanned the years from preschool through third grade and emphasized parent involvement, (congruent with Head Start's) through the elementary grades. As a result, Follow Through offered children and parents some continuity as they made the preschool-school transition. In all of the national evaluation studies, however, little attention was paid to transition (Haney, 1977; Stebbins, et al., 1977).

Project Developmental Continuity

One of the demonstration programs supported by the Office of Child Development (now the Administration for Children, Youth and Families -- ACYF) included Head Start's first attempt to work directly with the public schools for the purpose of improving the transition of children and families from Head Start to school -- Project Developmental Continuity (PDC). From 1974 to 1979, funds went to 15 demonstration PDC programs for collaboration with one or more public schools in order to "assure continuity of experiences for children from preschool through the early primary years..." and "to develop models for developmental continuity that can be implemented on a wide scale in Head Start and other child development programs and school systems" (Love, Granville, & Smith, 1978, p. 1).

Project Developmental Continuity established collaborative working relationships between Head Start programs and public schools. An early evaluation report described the two types of continuity that were of concern:

- "A child should not have to have his or her personal nature and needs rediscovered each year as he or she moves from one grade to the next....
- In the context of school structure, continuity implies cooperative pursuit of common goals, and this involves articulation of philosophies and methods in all the various areas of school enterprise" (Love, Granville, & Smith, 1978, p. 2).

Two "models" of continuity were instituted, one installing a new administrative structure in communities where Head Start and the public schools operated under separate auspices, and the other creating an "early childhood school" where Head Start programs were already operating in elementary school buildings. In both cases, "a qualitatively different program [was] expected to emerge as a result of the Head Start-elementary school cooperation" (Love, et al., 1978, p. 2). Program guidelines published by the national Head Start office provided a framework for implementation by setting forth requirements for administrative coordination, educational curricula, pre- and inservice training, developmental support services, parent involvement, services for handicapped children, and bilingual-bicultural and multicultural education.

Implementation of PDC was difficult, and none of the ten sites that remained through 1979 attained consistently high levels of PDC model implementation. Where implementation levels were highest, local comparison schools and Head Start programs began doing a lot of the same things, thus making it difficult for the evaluation to find significant outcomes favoring PDC participants. (In some sites during the early elementary years, PDC children showed more positive learning attitudes or styles than comparison children [Bond, 1982].) The PDC evaluation is the only study we know of that has looked at the links between transition programs and school achievement.

ACYF's Transition Initiative

In the spring of 1986, ACYF began its "National Initiative on Transition from Preschool to Elementary School." This initiative led to guidelines and recommendations for early childhood educators at both the preschool and kindergarten levels. Four elements are seen as critical to successful transition, thus providing "a more coordinated educational experience for young children and their families" (ACYF, n.d., p. 22):

- "providing program continuity through developmentally appropriate curricula for preschool and kindergarten children;
- maintaining ongoing communication and cooperation between preschool and kindergarten staff;
- preparing children for the transition; and
- involving parents in the transition" (ACYF, n.d., p. 5).

ACYF also funded 15 demonstration programs for two years "to develop innovative models for transitioning children and families which could be replicated by other Head Start programs." Fifteen additional programs were funded in 1987. These demonstration projects are described in a publication produced by ACYF (1988). A small-scale evaluation was conducted on the first 15 programs, comparing their efforts to a stratified random sample of 144 Head Start programs without special demonstrations (Hubbell, Plantz, Condelli, & Barrett, 1987). Overall, 70 percent of the programs surveyed implemented a variety of transition activities (e.g., information sharing, joint planning, parent visits to schools), with demonstration sites being more likely to conduct these activities than the other programs.

The ACYF study also reported a number of effects of transition activities. For example:

- The more that teachers participated in transition activities, the higher they rated the preparedness of Head Start children and the lower the initial stress of the children, as reported by parents.
- When principals and teachers participated more in transition activities, they had greater involvement with parents.
- When parents participated in more traditional activities (e.g., PTA), school teachers rated their children higher on preparedness for school.

These findings, based largely on self-administered surveys, supported the inclusion of certain variables in this study. They also suggest that transition efforts at some level may be more common than anticipated, with, for example, 60 percent of the random sample of Head Start programs arranging for children to visit their receiving school. In some regions, transition activities were more likely to occur when the Head Start program was operated by the school system.

State Transition Efforts

An example of a state-level transition effort is the one developed by the New Jersey Department of Education (Glicksman & Hills, 1981). It focuses on communication as the central need, under the premise that with communication will come cooperation and an easier transition for the child. The elements of concern include who should be involved in the transition, when the exchange should take place, what activities can link participants, and what information should be exchanged.

Transition in Special Education

In special education, transition activities generally refer to procedures to help individual children achieve "smooth placement and subsequent adjustment" when moving from one program to another (Hutinger, 1982, p. 2) and may include transition from a 0-3 program into "regular" preschool as well as the move from preschool to kindergarten. Recommendations for smoothing the transition, therefore, focus on how to prepare for the needs of individual children and families, although elements in common with the ACYF program are also included, e.g., developing good communication between early childhood special education programs and kindergarten programs. Fowler, Chandler, Johnson, and Stella (1986) stress parent involvement in the transition process for children with disabilities because of the many family changes and adjustments that transitions require.

Gallaher, Maddox, and Edgar (1984) developed an Early Childhood Interagency Transition Model. It begins with a "troubleshooting guide" to enable program operators to identify the need for transition procedures and the source of any difficulties (e.g., "Do all people involved understand what the major transition events are, who will be involved, who is responsible for each activity, how the transition will be carried out, and what is the timing of the events?"). Specific strategies are suggested for particular problems, organized in six areas where transition activities are considered critical:

- transfer of records;
- timing of transition events;
- awareness of programs;
- parent involvement;
- decisionmaking process; and
- postplacement communication.

The model goes a step further than most procedures we have seen in strongly recommending that the transition activities be monitored and in suggesting methods for judging both overall outcomes and the effects of individual transition strategies. Although developed in the context of transition for handicapped children, this model has implications for understanding the important elements of transition for all children.

National Diffusion Network Programs

The National Diffusion Network (NDN) provides information to schools on educational programs that have been shown to be effective and that have been approved by the U.S. Department of Education's Program Effectiveness Panel (formerly the Joint Dissemination Review Panel). While most programs do not specifically address transition, many do so implicitly in that they provide activities that span the preschool and kindergarten years. One example is Strategies in Early Childhood Education, "a continuous-growth program with sequential program materials that bridges the gap between preschool, kindergarten and first grade" (NDN, 1988, p. I-11); another is Early Prevention of School Failure designed to "identify developmental levels and learning styles of children ages four to six years" (NDN, 1988, p. I-3).

Local Program Evaluations

Abecedarian Project

The Abecedarian Project, a carefully controlled early intervention program in North Carolina, has shown impressive results when support is provided to children and families entering the public schools (Ramey & Campbell, 1987). The early intervention component provided services to children from six weeks of age to kindergarten. The program focus was on parent involvement, child health, and cognitive and social stimulation. Preliminary studies of program effectiveness showed trends similar to those of other early intervention projects: benefits for participating children plateaued in early elementary school. When participants entered first grade, half were randomly assigned to a home/school resource teacher who provided liaison services to families and teachers. Third grade test results found that in terms of both IQ scores and achievement data, the most successful children were those who participated in both the early intervention and elementary support and the children with the poorest outcomes were those without benefit of either service.

The Kramer Model

A program designed to provide for children within the day as well as across settings (the Kramer Model) was developed by Bettye Caldwell (Elardo & Caldwell, 1974). Year-round, full-day care and schooling for children ages 6 months to 12 years served families within a predominantly low-income neighborhood in Little Rock. The project was funded by the school district and other monies but was not integrated into the elementary school. Many transition activities were developed, including cross-age grouping, informal visits to classrooms, and developmentally appropriate classrooms. Effectiveness of the program was difficult to show because of the mobility of families, especially at the point measurement would be most important (i.e., when children entered first grade, as there was no state kindergarten program in Arkansas at the time).

Brookline Early Education Project

The studies reviewed up to this point have, as their focus, disadvantaged children and families. Very little research has examined transition for middle-class children, but the little that exists suggests that schools' attention to transition issues can aid in long-term gains for children, both academically and socially.

The Brookline Early Education Project (BEEP) (Pierson et al., 1984) was designed to prevent school-related difficulties and was an official program in the public school system. Services were available to all parents residing in the district and included programs for children from infancy to age five and an array of parent programs. Most of the families participating in the program were middle-class, but a range of socioeconomic levels was represented. Participating children, upon reaching second grade, were found to have significantly fewer classroom behavior problems and less difficulty in reading. While these findings applied to children of all social classes, more intensive outreach by staff was necessary to produce effects for children whose parents had lower levels of formal education.

Project Giant Step

Project Giant Step began in 1986 as a city initiative providing comprehensive services to low-income children and families not served by existing programs. Housed in public schools, Head Start centers, and day care centers, the program included a half-day developmental program for children, support services for families and a program to help parents become more involved in their children's education. An evaluation of the program after two years of operation (Layzer et al., 1990) showed positive effects on children, families and staff. Children demonstrated significant gains on measures of cognitive, social, and organizational skills. Parents' attitudes toward child development and beliefs about childrearing changed positively over the course of the program year, as did their classroom participation. Highly qualified staff members received ongoing staff development and reported satisfaction with both the training and the program in general. Turnover rates for staff were lower than the national average.

Jarvis (1989) examined continuity for children in the Giant Step program by comparing the physical environments, types of classroom activities, instructional groupings, and adult/child interactions in Giant Step, kindergarten, and first grade classrooms. Activities in preschool classes were predominately experiential while those in first grade were mostly instructional. Kindergarten programs appeared to serve as a transition between preschool and first grade as they combined both approaches, being more instructional than preschool but more experiential than first grade.

Issues Related to School Readiness

Despite increasing policy support for not retaining children (e.g., National Governors' Association, 1990; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1990) and a growing research base showing negative effects for doing so, the practice continues. Extra-year programs, sometimes regarded by practitioners as giving children "the gift of time" are currently being criticized as being another form of retention. Not all children are at equal risk for being retained or assigned to extra-year programs and the long-range implications of this practice carry important implications for some children's school success or failure. Retention and extra-year programs can be used as part of a school's approach to continuity when the setting a child is moving into is perceived to be too difficult for the child to function in successfully. The incidence and implications of each practice are reviewed as they relate to kindergarten programs.

Retention

Meisels and Liaw (1991) examined the impact of retention in kindergarten through grade three by using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (Hafner et al, 1990). The children most likely to be retained were low-income, minority males. By eighth grade, these children scored lower on measures of academic achievement, self-concept, and internalized locus of control.

Slightly over 18% of students are retained at least once during their kindergarten-to-grade 8 careers. Contrary to the overall finding of low-income, minority boys being retained significantly more often, when kindergarten retention rates were isolated from retention at other grade levels, white, higher-income children were found to be the children most often retained. The incidence of retention from kindergarten through third grade are: Kindergarten: 11.7%, Grade 1: 25.9%, Grade 2: 14.5%, and Grade 3: 12.4%.

In a meta-analysis of 63 studies on retention, only 9 showed positive effects of retention (Holmes, 1989). Retainees showed an advantage immediately after retention, but the advantage declined until after three grades: no difference existed between the children who were retained and at-risk students who were not retained.

Extra-Year Programs

In a recent review of retention practices, Schultz (1989) cited 40 states as reporting the existence of readiness or transition classes in at least some schools. Readiness classes refer to an extra-year program prior to the kindergarten year for children deemed not ready for kindergarten. Transition classes follow the kindergarten year and are targeted at children considered lacking the necessary skills or maturity to succeed in grade 1.

Smith and Shepard (1989) see no difference between the effects of retention and those of extra-year classes: "Two years in kindergarten even when one year is labeled "transition program," fail to enhance achievement or solve the problem of inadequate school readiness." In the first part of a 5-year longitudinal study, Walsh et al. (1991) found that younger, poor boys were 32 times more likely than older nonpoor girls to be enrolled in readiness classes. Neither SES, ethnicity nor gender as single variables predict placement in readiness classes, but the combination of the three variables has strong predictive power in showing which children are assigned.

Gredler (1984) reviewed five studies on transition classes (i.e., extra-year classes between kindergarten and first grade) and only one (Raygor, 1972) reported achievement benefits for children in the transition program over comparable children placed in regular first grade classes. The initial benefit of the transition year was negated by third grade (Shepard & Smith, 1987). There are implications beyond achievement when children are assigned to extra-year classes. Bell (1972) found children in the transition classes to be lower in self-esteem and self confidence than the at-risk children enrolled in first grade.

References

Administration for Children, Youth and Families. (1988). *Transition from preschool to kindergarten*. (1988). (Notebook with cassettes.) Chapel Hill, NC: Chapel Hill Training-Outreach Project.

Administration for Children, Youth and Families. (n.d.). *Easing the transition from preschool to kindergarten: A guide for early childhood teachers and administrators*. (Pamphlet) Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Barnett, W.S., & Escobar, C.M. (1987). The economics of early educational intervention: A Review. *Review of Educational Research*. *57*(4), 387-414.

Bell, M. (1972). A study of the readiness room program in small school district in suburban Detroit, Michigan. Doctoral dissertation, Wayne State University.

Bond, J.T., et. al. (1982). *Project developmental continuity evaluation: Final report, Volume 1: Outcomes of the PDC intervention*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.

Caldwell, B. (1991). Continuity in the early years: Transitions between grades and systems. In S.L. Kagan (Ed.) *The Care and education of America's young children: Obstacles and opportunities*. Chicago: Ninetieth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education.

Caldwell, B., & Richmond, J. (1968). The Children's Center in Syracuse, New York. In L.L. Dittman (Ed.), *Early child care: The new perspectives*. New York: Atherton Press.

Elardo, P., & Caldwell, B. (1974). The Kramer adventure: A school for the future. *Childhood Education*, *50*, 143-152.

Fowler, S.A., Chandler, L.K., Johnson, E.T., & Stella, M.E. (1986). *Individualizing family involvement in school transitions*. unpublished manuscript, University of Kansas, Bureau of Child Research, Lawrence.

Gallaher, J., Maddox, M., & Edgar, E. (1984). *Early childhood interagency transition model*. Bellevue, WA: Edmark Corporation.

Glicksman, K., & Hill, T. (1981). *Easing the child's transition between home, child care center & school: A Guide for early childhood educators*. (Early Childhood Education Resource Guides). Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Department of Education.

Gray, S. (1967). *The early training project*. Washington, DC: Research and Evaluation Office, Project Head Start, OEO.

Gredler, G.R. (1984). Transition classes: A viable alternative for the at-risk child? *Psychology and the Schools*, *21*.

Hafner, A., Ingels, S., Schneider, B., & Stevenson, D. (1990). *A profile of the American eighth grader: The National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988.* Washington D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

Haney, W. (1977). *The Follow Through planned variation experiment, Volume V: A technical history of the national Follow Through evaluation)*. Cambridge, MA: Huron Institute.

Hodges, W., Branden, Feldman, R., Follins, J., Love, J.M., et al. (1980). *Follow Through: Forces for change in the primary schools*. Ypsilanti, MI: High Scope Educational Research Foundation.

Holmes, C.T., & Matthews, K.M., (1989). The effects of nonpromotion on elementary and junior high school pupils: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational research* *54*, 225-236.

Hubbell, R., Plantz, M., Condelli, L., & Barrett, B. (1987). *Final report: The transition of Head Start children into public school, Vol I*. Report to ACYF, DHHS (BOA No. 105-86-8123), Washington, DC: CSR, Inc.

Hutinger, P.L. (1982, April). *Transition practices: When children move from one program to another*. Paper presented at the annual convention of the Council for Exceptional Children, Houston, TX.

Jarvis, C.H. (1989, March). Take two Giant Steps: Continuity from prekindergarten to kindergarten in New York City public schools. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco.

Layzer, J.I., Goodson, B.D., & Layzer, J.A. (1990). *Evaluation of Project Giant Step: Year Two Report: The Study of Program Effects*. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates.

Love, J.M., Granville, A.C., & Smith, A.G. (1978). *A Process evaluation of project developmental continuity: Final report of the PDC Feasibility Study, 1974-1977*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.

McKey, R.H., Condelli, L., Ganson, H., McConkey, C., & Plantz, M.C. (1985, June). *The impact of Head Start on children, families and communities*. Final report of the Head Start evaluation, synthesis and utilization project. (Prepared under contract No. 105-81-C-026.) Washington, DC: CSR, Incorporated.

Meisels, S.J., & Liaw, Fong-ruey (1991). Does early retention in grade reduce the risk of later academic failure? Unpublished paper, University of Michigan.

National Association of Elementary School Principals (1990). Standards for quality programs for young children: Early childhood education and the elementary school principals. Alexandria, VA:Author.

National Diffusion Network. (1988). Educational programs that work: A collection of proven exemplary educational programs and practices. Fourteenth Edition. Longmont, CO.: Sopris West.

National Governors' Association (1990). Educating America: State strategies for achieving the national education goals. Report of the task force on education. Washington, DC: Author.

Pierson, D.E., Walker, D.K.,& Tivnan, T. (1984). A school-based program from infancy to kindergarten for children and their parents. Personnel and Guidance Journal 62(8), 448-455.

Ramey, C., & Campbell, A. (1987). The Carolina Abecedarian Project: An educational experiment concerning human malleability, In J. Gallagher, & C.Ramey (Eds.), The malleability of children. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Raygor, B. (1972). A five-year follow-up study comparing the school achievement and school adjustment of children retained in kindergarten and children placed in a transition class. Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota.

Schultz, T. (1989). Testing and retention of young children: Moving from controversy to reform. Phi Delta Kappan, 71(2), 125-129.

Shepard, L.A., & Smith, M.L. (Eds.) (1989). Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention. New York: Palmer Press.

Smith, M.L., & Shepard, L.A. (1989). Flunking grades: A recapitulation. In L.A. Shepard & M.L. Smith (Eds.), Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention (pp. 214-236). New York: Falmer Press.

Stebbins, L.B., St. Pierre, R.G., Proper, E.C., Anderson, R.B., & Cerva, T.R. (1977). Education as experimentation: a Planned variation model. In Volume IV-A: An evaluation of Follow Through. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates.

Walsh, D.J., Ellwein, M.C., Eads, G.M., & Miller, A.K. (1991). Knocking on kindergarten's door: Who gets in? Who's kept out? Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 6, 89-100.

Weikart, D.P. (1989, June). Quality preschool programs: A long-term social investment. Occasional Paper No. 5, Ford Foundation Project on Social Welfare and the American Future. New York: Ford Foundation.

Weikart, D.P., Kamii, C.K., & Radin, N.L. (1967). Perry preschool project progress report. In D.P. Weikart (Ed.) Preschool intervention: A preliminary report of the Perry Preschool Project. Ann Arbor, MI: Campus Publishers.

APPENDIX B: SITE VISIT SUMMARIES

Program Context

Approach to Continuity

Key Features of the Program

INTRODUCTION

Each team of site visitors spent 4-5 days at each site. Following the site visit, team members were asked to read through their interviews, observations and notes and to write a brief summary of their findings. In order to standardize the format of these reports, site visitors were asked specifically to address the following features of the school, approach to continuity, and the transition activities employed in order to enhance continuity for children entering kindergarten in that particular school:

- community and school district characteristics
- the elementary school
- feeder preschools
- approach to continuity
  - structure
  - transition activities with preschool programs/staff
  - transition activities for incoming children and families
  - continuity beyond kindergarten
- key features of the school's program

The full summary reports of the eight sites are included in this appendix.

CONTENTS

Hillside Elementary School B-7
Lakeside School B-11
Plainville School B-14
Seaview Magnet School B-18
Westside School B-22
Southside Early Childhood School B-26
Pioneer Primary School B-30
Bear Valley School B-34

CONTINUITY AT HILLSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Program Context

Community and School District Characteristics

Twenty miles northwest of a large southwestern city, lies the world's largest adult living community, an exclusive, walled-in area with mile after mile of Spanish-style homes on neatly landscaped yards. Less than three miles away, a group of dedicated educators is working in the unified school district to create a better transition for children entering public-school kindergarten. This district, though having one of the smallest enrollments (3,872 in K-12) in the northwest valley, encompasses 140 square miles of primarily agricultural land. The district serves three small towns and an air force base in what is predominantly a low-income area. Unskilled agricultural labor is the economic mainstay of the community.

The Elementary School

The single-story, multi-wing structure that houses Hillside Elementary School is neatly laid out with well-maintained lawns between wings and ample playground areas. Exterior walkways along the classroom wings, made possible by the year-round temperate climate, create an air of openness. Smiling and talking, children easily move from their classrooms to the cafeteria and to playgrounds in orderly lines. It is a comfortable environment where visitors are warmly welcomed by friendly staff and students who readily converse with visitors and each other in both Spanish and English.

Hillside Elementary School enrolls 737 children in grades K through 6. Hillside has the highest percentage of children from low-income families of any of the district's four elementary schools, with 94% qualifying for the free or reduced-price lunch program. The racial/ethnic make-up of the school mirrors that of the town of Hillside: 91% Hispanic, 7.5% White, and 1.5% African-American. Some 40% of the students are migrant children who often enter school late in the year and leave before the school year ends in the spring. The school finds the development of language skills to be particularly challenging, with 68% of the students (K-6) falling below the 50th percentile on ITBS Total Language Skills. (At second grade, 82% are below the 50th percentile.)

Hillside has six half-day kindergarten classes that enroll a total of 130 students. This includes one designated bilingual kindergarten for children with limited English skills and a "developmental kindergarten" that provides special instruction for children who are considered not ready for the regular program.

Two temporary buildings on the Hillside campus house the office of the district's migrant education program, with its parent advisory committee room and two spacious preschool classrooms. It is here that 61 four-year-olds are being prepared to move into the Hillside kindergarten program in September. Two preschool classrooms (one funded through the federal Migrant Head

Start program and the other through a state migrant education grant) operate with a 1:10 adult to child ratio under the leadership of the migrant program director.

Feeder Preschools

Although most of Hillside's entering kindergartners with preschool experience come through the program operated on its campus, another 12 to 15 children each year come from the local Head Start program, administered by a separate Head Start grantee agency less than a mile from the school. These are the only preschool programs that send more than one or two children to kindergarten at Hillside. It is believed that the other 40% of incoming kindergartners have no formal preschool program experience.

Approach to Continuity

Structure

Continuity for children at Hillside Elementary School is based primarily on the relationship among three components: (1) a preschool program to prepare migrant children for kindergarten (described above); (2) a developmental kindergarten program for children deemed not ready for regular kindergarten; and (3) use of the same language-based curriculum in both preschool and kindergarten (described below). The migrant program director oversees the preschool component; the elementary school principal is responsible for the developmental kindergarten and the new language-based curriculum of the preschool and kindergarten.

The developmental kindergarten, which functions as a readiness class, is purposely kept small; current enrollment is 12 students, or 9% of all kindergartners. This policy reflects a belief that the school should work with children at whatever level they are functioning when they enter. The developmental kindergarten is not an extra year, but rather allows more individualized attention for preparing the children for first grade. Thanks to a new state grant, the separate developmental kindergarten will be eliminated next year, and the funds will be used to hire additional teachers and parents to lower staff-child ratios in all kindergarten classes, as well as in grades 1 through 3. This will result in all children being heterogeneously grouped.

The migrant preschool program at Hillside has been evaluated each year by tracking the progress of children through the primary grades and comparing migrant children who have gone through the program with migrant children whose parents elected not to participate. At first and second grade in 1988-89, all migrant program participants were at grade level, whereas only 37% and 49% of the respective comparison groups were at the age-appropriate grade level.

Transition Activities with Preschool Programs/Staff

As previously noted, a major element in promoting continuity is the coordinated language curriculum that is in place in both preschool and kindergarten: namely, K-TALK --Kindergarten-Teacher Administered Language Kit (a program validated by the U.S. Department of Education's Program Effectiveness Panel and disseminated by the National Diffusion Network). K-TALK serves as an important first step in the school's efforts to improve language instruction, and its implementation initially required joint planning by preschool and elementary school staff.

Now that K-TALK is in place, staff members report little communication or ongoing coordination between the two levels other than the discussions a kindergarten teacher may have with a preschool teacher or director with respect to the assessment of a child. The exception to this is the developmental kindergarten teacher, who meets twice a year with the preschool teachers to discuss their overall programs, the K-TALK curriculum, and particular children. This interaction is usually initiated by the developmental kindergarten teacher.

Transition Activities for Incoming Children and Families

Orientation activities are conducted in August prior to the beginning of school. Children and their parents are scheduled to meet in groups of ten. The children receive screening assessments by a team consisting of a teacher, nurse, and speech and language specialist. At the same time, the principal meets with the parents and explains the process. The teacher of the developmental kindergarten takes new children on a tour of the classroom and other areas to which they will need access (e.g., the nurse's office) and then meets individually with each parent. She provides parents with a brochure on developmentally appropriate practices and explains how the Hillside developmental kindergarten operates. The bilingual kindergarten teacher provides comparable information in Spanish for limited-English-proficient parents.

Continuity Beyond Kindergarten

At the time of the site visit, no special K-3 continuity efforts were found beyond those typically provided by a district's curriculum scope and sequence. A tangible attempt to create continuity beyond kindergarten, however, is evidenced by the recently funded state grant, which will provide for a consistent curriculum approach throughout grades K-3. According to the grant proposal, a holistic language approach will be designed to promote a love of reading in all subject areas and to develop students' problem solving skills. Parents will be trained to implement learning in the home ("family language, family math and science, family social studies, and family reading") and to serve as "classroom language facilitators."

Key Features of the Hillside Program

The Hillside Elementary School serves an unusually high proportion of children from low-income, minority, and migrant families. About half of all kindergarten children each year come from the migrant preschool program located on the school's campus. The preschool program is supported with outside funds (state migrant program and Head Start) that provide facilities, staff, and a strong parent involvement component. A major transition activity at Hillside is the commercial language curriculum that has been implemented at both the preschool and kindergarten levels. Other transition efforts include informal (though limited) interaction between preschool and kindergarten staff, and orientation activities for incoming kindergartners and their parents. Recent state funding of the school's proposal to develop a consistent curriculum approach throughout grades K-3, based on holistic language development and parent involvement, should provide a common foundation upon which continuity can be built throughout the grades.

CONTINUITY AT LAKESIDE SCHOOL

Program Context

Community and School District Characteristics

Lakeside is a small, picturesque city overlooking the water, near a major west coast city. The array of art galleries, expensive restaurants, upscale boutiques, and beautiful homes with breathtaking hillside views, however, misleads only the tourists. This visible display of wealth is not generally representative of the socioeconomic diversity that characterizes the city and the distinct communities that make up the Lakeside School District.

The school district is a small one, serving 402 students in grades K-8, of whom 345 go to Lakeside School and 62 to North Lake School, a small alternative school serving grades K-8 in three classes. The district draws students from four disparate constituencies: white upperclass Lakeside families, many of whom send their children to private schools in Golden Valley; an economically mixed community in Lakeside; a public housing project in Port City, whose tenants are predominately African-American; and three military bases. Although there is a strong sense of community both within Lakeside and Port City, the single school district has not yet succeeded in bridging the two. Active parent groups, through mechanisms such as fundraising to provide free transportation to and from school, are now working towards bringing the two cities closer together.

The Elementary School

Lakeside School is situated on a large campus on a hill above the lake. The structure itself currently consists of a number of portable modules surrounding a sizeable concrete foyer, but work is underway on a new building nearby.

Of Lakeside's 345 students, 40% are African-American, 3% are Asian, and the remaining 57% are White. Approximately 40% of the students receive free or reduced-price lunches.

Two kindergarten classrooms accommodate a total of 50 children. Kindergarten classes are run on a split schedule with overlap between the morning and afternoon sessions. As a result, during the early morning and late afternoon each class has 11 or 12 children, and only during the midday are all 25 children present in a classroom. The two kindergartens emphasize academic skills.

There is also an "early kindergarten" class that operates half-days from January to the end of the school year for children too young to make the December cutoff for kindergarten enrollment, or for children who are age-ready for kindergarten but whose parents wish to hold them out an additional year. Parents are given the opportunity to request that their children participate in this program, but if fewer than 10 students are enrolled, the early kindergartners are incorporated into the regular kindergarten programs.

If 10 or more enroll, a half-time teacher is hired to teach the class. The purpose of this program is to familiarize children with the routines and expectations of kindergarten.

Feeder Preschools

Other than the early kindergarten class described above, there are no preschool programs housed at Lakeside School.

Of several preschool programs in the community, four public programs provide the preschool experience of most Lakeside kindergartners from low-income families. Lakeside children are most likely to have attended a cooperative preschool in Lakeside. Port City children typically have attended one of the preschools operated under the umbrella of the Port City Community Foundation, which includes Lake County Head Start; the Port City Community Preschool, which is open to children of welfare recipients who are currently working or in school; or the Port City Learning Center, which serves children with special needs.

Approach to Continuity

Structure

The model of transition that was found in Lakeside differs dramatically from the programs described at the seven other sites visited in this study. It is an externally driven, rather than school-based, model -- i.e., the primary leadership for transition activities comes from outside the school or its district office.

Almost all of the transition activities affecting Lakeside School emanate from a working group called the Early Childhood Networking Group, which includes representatives from the Laboratory for Educational Research and Development (a federally funded entity), the Institute for Education (a private, non-profit research/service organization), Port City Community Action, the Lakeside School District, and parents. Of the district's four major constituencies, Lakeside and Port City are represented in this group; the houseboat community and military bases are not. Organized in fall 1989 to address the problems of children at risk, the Early Childhood Networking Group decided to focus on preschool-kindergarten-first-grade transition. The Laboratory for Research and Development (the Lab) funds a facilitator for the group; it has also offered to cover the cost of substitutes for Lakeside and North Lake teachers who attend the group's meetings or participate in its related activities, though this has not yet been necessary.

Transition Activities with Preschool Programs/Staff

During the 1989-90 academic year, the Early Childhood Networking Group met once each month. These meetings included presentations from the various agencies involved to acquaint the group with one another's programs, brainstorming sessions about how best to facilitate a smooth transition for children entering kindergarten, and focused discussions of issues and strategies. Working committees were established to plan and implement transition activities at the two elementary schools and in the communities. For example, the group organized classroom visits for preschool teachers to observe kindergarten and first-grade classrooms and for kindergarten and first-grade teachers to observe preschool classrooms. Interviews with teachers and administrators indicated that these visits helped promote a sense of collegiality, provided useful information to teachers in understanding the transition young children experience, and resulted in some new instances of informal coordination between the teachers. Prior to these visits, preschool and elementary staff had little or no communication with each other or awareness of the other's programs.

Because the Early Childhood Networking Group is only now in its first year, there is little more that can be reported at this time, except to note that in rallying the community to address the preschool-kindergarten-first-grade transition difficulties of children at risk, the community is attempting to deliver needed leadership, sound technical assistance, and strong parent/community support to the district's two elementary schools and their teachers. Participation in the Early Childhood Networking Group also seems to be helping teachers better familiarize themselves with the diverse organizations, personalities, lifestyles, and needs of the community they serve, an important benefit since many teachers do not live in the Lakeside school district. This interaction is intended to promote increased collaboration between the schools and community resources, not only around issues of continuity but also with respect to the comprehensive provision of services to young children. The group is currently making decisions about its next steps and its goals for the 1990-91 academic year.

Key Features of the Lakeside Program

The Lakeside approach to promoting continuity between preschool and kindergarten is unique within this study. It is a community-based model, one whose vision, leadership, funding, and bulk of its membership are based outside the school. With the Lab serving as catalyst, the Early Childhood Networking Group since its inception in fall 1989 has already achieved an active participant list of some 46 community-based educators and human service specialists, preschool and elementary teachers, and concerned parents, as well as the support of some 15 prominent public agencies and institutions that the participants represent. Transition accomplishments during the group's first year include the exchange of classroom visitations among preschool, kindergarten, and first-grade teachers for the purpose of building awareness of the transition difficulties at-risk children encounter and of the need for planning and coordination among the three levels of teachers.

CONTINUITY AT PLAINVILLE SCHOOL

Program Context

Community and School District Characteristics

Plainville is a small town in a central state with a stable, homogeneous population of 2,100. Many of the residents of this farming community now commute 45 minutes to an hour to jobs in nearby cities. The school district covers a wide geographical area; 45-minute bus rides to and from school are not unusual. The district's 795 students are served by three schools, including Plainville School (PK-4), a middle school (5-8), and a high school (9-12).

The Elementary School

Sections of Plainville School were built prior to 1920, but student, teacher, and community pride lend contemporary vibrancy to the school, as evidenced by a recently planted Earth Day flower bed near the school's entrance, children's artwork decorating the hallways, and even downtown store windows displaying Plainville School art. There is a tradition of teachers being firmly rooted in the community and actively involved in civic events, and many of them (as well as most of the parents interviewed in this study) attended the school as children. Plainville School's 361 predominately white students, 50% of whom qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, appear healthy, friendly, and noticeably respectful of each other and their elders.

The 36 kindergarten children at Plainville School are divided into three classes staffed by a full-time and a half-time teacher. Because transportation costs preclude half-day kindergarten, all classes are full days on an alternate-day schedule. In response to parent and staff objections to the discontinuity of this arrangement, kindergarten will become a full 5-day program beginning in September 1990. The kindergarten curriculum is strongly influenced by the academic expectations of first-grade teachers, but a developmental perspective brought to Plainville School by the preschool is now beginning to be evident.

Plainville School's state-supported preschool program for high-risk children serves 40 four-year-olds. A certified teacher and one highly experienced assistant provide a 4-day, center-based program; the fifth day is used for home visits and outreach. A home-based program for 3-year-olds, staffed by another certified teacher, also brings these younger children and their families into the center one day a week. These programs, supported by a statewide initiative for at-risk children, follow NAEYC guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices. The state provides inservice training opportunities for learning more about developmental methods; both the Plainville School principal and district superintendent have participated in such training, as have the preschool and kindergarten teachers.

Feeder Preschools

Plainville School preschool program staff are liberal in their definition of "high risk," and consequently, most Plainville children are considered eligible for preschool services. Most continue on to kindergarten at the school each September. Other feeder programs are few. A private, academically focused nursery school closed this spring due to the teacher's retirement, and Head Start serves fewer than 10 Plainville children in its home-based program. (It should be noted that enrollment in Plainville School's preschool program does not preclude involvement in Head Start; coordination efforts between the Plainville preschool and Head Start ensure that all eligible children receive appropriate services.)

Approach to Continuity

Structure

An unwritten, informal set of transition activities exist for preschool-kindergarten transition under the leadership of the superintendent. Factors supporting the approach to continuity include the interest of the principal in encouraging developmentally appropriate teaching practices; the advocacy of the superintendent's wife who founded the preschool program, secured the state grant to fund it, and serves there as a teaching/ administrative assistant; the stability of the community and teaching staff; and the strong ties among school staff, parents, and the community in general.

Two of these factors deserve further comment. First, Plainville School enjoys high parent involvement at all grade levels. Parents in both the preschool and kindergarten programs feel involved and that their opinions are valued by teachers and administrators. And second, the high-risk preschool owes much to the strong vision of the teaching/ administrative assistant, who actively seeks to educate Plainville School teachers, administrators, and parents to the principles and value of developmental education for the young. Her multiple roles, teaching experience, and interpersonal skills allow her to cross boundaries between school and community, administration and state-level policymakers, thus enabling her to serve as a unique vehicle for promoting continuity at Plainville School.

Although state policies have created new opportunities for promoting continuity between preschool and kindergarten, they have also resulted in new challenges. For instance, the state-funded preschool is prohibited from serving children who are age-eligible for kindergarten. In addition, teacher certification requirements for at-risk preschool programs are stringent, making qualified staff difficult to secure. Many of the state's Head Start teachers have moved to higher-paying teaching jobs in the public schools, creating a degree of tension between Head Start and local communities.

Because of the state's restrictions prohibiting at-risk preschools from serving kindergarten age-eligible children, the concerns of Plainville School's preschool teachers for children's social and emotional readiness for kindergarten sometimes result in difficult decisions for parents. Teachers continue to recommend that children considered not ready for kindergarten be held out another year, even though the preschool itself cannot serve the children for a second year. Because alternatives to kindergarten are scarce and expensive, parents and school administrators have little choice but to adhere to the policy belief that all age-eligible children should attend kindergarten. A child who experiences difficulty in adjusting to the demands of school may then be retained in first or second grade.

The Plainville School principal, through discussions with teachers and parents, informally evaluates the school's transition activities on an on-going basis; the state also conducts an annual review of the preschool program. In addition, preschool staff intend to track their students' progress through the primary grades using standardized test scores (the SRA Achievement Series). Data are not yet available, inasmuch as the preschool has only now ended its second year of operation and the first testing point occurred subsequent to this study's site visit.

Transition Activities with Preschool Programs/Staff

Formally scheduled meetings are held between Plainville School kindergarten teachers and the Plainville Head Start teachers, but this coordination is limited and primarily initiated by the school. Coordination between the school's preschool and kindergarten teachers is accomplished informally. Teachers routinely visit each other's classrooms, share materials, and participate alongside their colleagues in inservice workshops that focus on developmental perspectives. Preschool teachers initiate joint activities with the kindergartens, and they share the same playground with commonly scheduled recess times.

Transition Activities for Incoming Children and Families

Like transition activities between preschool and kindergarten staff, most transition activities involving incoming children and families are informal. Parents and teachers generally already know each other as community members and feel free to raise questions outside the school environment. However, parents reportedly receive most information about kindergarten from parents with older children and from school notices.

Information packets are sent to prospective kindergarten parents by kindergarten teachers prior to children entering school. Parents and children are welcome to visit classrooms, though no formal orientation or visitation day is arranged. The Brigance Screening Test is administered to prospective kindergartners each spring. Chapter 1 personnel then provide a 4-week summer tutorial for children found deficient in basic skills.

Continuity Beyond Kindergarten

Both the principal and superintendent hope that the influence of the developmental philosophy brought to Plainville School by staff of the high-risk preschool will "trickle up" the grades. Although kindergarten teachers continue to report pressure from first-grade teachers for children to have mastered academic skills and behavioral self-control, school administrators clearly favor a greater focus on a developmental learning approach.

Key Features of the Plainville Program

Plainville School illustrates how substantial progress toward continuity can be achieved in a relatively short time through a combination of new funding sources and strong leadership. The efforts of a knowledgeable person with vision, whose position in the community enabled her to enlist the support of decisionmakers, teachers, and parents, helped secure state funding to initiate a developmental preschool program within a traditional, academically oriented school. Convinced of the merits of the developmental approach, the principal began championing school change and promoting "trickle up" developmental practices. Strong parent involvement, close ties between teachers and the community, and a stable, homogeneous population were also found to promote continuity.

CONTINUITY AT SEAVIEW MAGNET SCHOOL

Program Context

Community and School District Characteristics

Seaview is one of the largest cities in the southern United States. In 1987, its population was estimated at 550,000, with some 1.4 million living in the greater metropolitan area. The 129 Seaview public schools serve over 84,000 students, an estimated 92% of whom are minorities (compared with the metropolitan area's 36% minority population). Approximately 85% of all students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. Another 32,000 school-age children (primarily non-minorities) are served by 94 private schools located in the area.

A growing emphasis on early childhood education in the state and in the Seaview public schools has resulted in Chapter 1 funds being used in Seaview to establish 100 preschool classes in 59 elementary schools, with the state augmenting Chapter 1 funds for preschools. In 1988, Seaview voters approved a 16.4 millage increase for public schools, part of which was earmarked for early childhood education.

The Elementary School

Seaview Magnet School is a creative arts magnet school, one of 47 magnet schools and programs available in the district for students with special needs and preferences. The school's 400 students (PK-6) reflect the overall demographic characteristics of the city's public schools.

Located virtually in the heart of the city's music and entertainment sector, which attracts tourists from all over the country, Seaview Magnet School is housed in a 60-year-old, three-story building that is slated for major renovation over the summer. The schoolyard is mostly dirt and weeds, with playground equipment squeezed between the building and the fence. Yet the run-down physical state of the building is not what strikes a visitor walking through the school. Student artwork and classroom projects brighten the hallways, the students appear friendly and energetic, and everyone -- staff and students -- clearly enjoys being at this school.

Following the British Infant School model, Seaview Magnet's children are grouped for instruction based upon their level of development, not their chronological age. A sufficient range of classroom materials are provided to ensure that each child will be engaged in developmentally appropriate activities. Fifty kindergartners are enrolled at the school. Classroom configurations this year include one class of 25 kindergartners with one teacher, and a class of 25 kindergartners and 10 preschoolers, staffed by one teacher, an aide, and parent volunteers. Another 5 kindergarten-aged children attend a first-grade class.

Two preschool classes were initiated this year by the school with Chapter 1 funds. These classes serve 40 preschoolers in full-day programs, each staffed by a teacher and an aide. A decade-old parent cooperative preschool program also operates as part of the combined kindergarten classroom previously mentioned; parents pay tuition for this program.

Feeder Preschools

Over 70% of the kindergartners at Seaview Magnet also attended preschool there. Because it is a magnet school, kindergartners come from preschools all over the district. Seaview's preschool also serves as a feeder for other schools' kindergartens: Each year 10-15 children may move on to other public kindergartens or private schools.

Approach to Continuity

Structure

Continuity at Seaview Magnet School is not the result of specific transition activities. Rather, it stems from the school's child-centered approach, including its use of multi-age classrooms. Responsibility for this approach is shared by the principal (who was formerly a kindergarten teacher and sets the tone for the entire school), and the teaching staff, who implement the approach and help parents gain an understanding of developmentally appropriate learning.

A number of school-based policies and underlying principles inform Seaview Magnet's child-centered approach. The most fundamental of these is a focus on getting children to like school and fostering positive self-esteem. This is emphasized more than the acquisition of specific skills and is ascribed to by all the school's teachers. First-grade teachers, for example, do not pressure kindergarten staff to teach certain skills. All children who make the age cut-off are accepted into kindergarten. There are no performance prerequisites; teachers work with each child's strengths at the time of entry. The school's use of multi-age classrooms allows a child to receive any needed special attention without being held back. Classroom configurations and student assignment to classes are determined each year by the strengths and needs of the children, with PK-3 treated as a single unit in terms of approach and materials used. Because Seaview is a creative arts magnet school, there is a wide spectrum of activities and disciplines in which a child can excel and which then can serve as a springboard to enhance the child's success in other areas. The school's whole child, developmental ideology is further reinforced through staff development workshops and selective hiring practices that seek out teachers who fit the school's model.

Transition activities are not evaluated per se, although preschool and kindergarten children do participate in a district-wide standardized testing program. The principal reported that Seaview Magnet places consistently among the top of the city's schools.

Transition Activities with Preschool Program/Staff

Transition activities between preschool and kindergarten at Seaview Magnet are the same as between other grades. Teachers have a "passing on" conference at the end of the year to confer about each child and to pass on relevant written information. They also use this opportunity to examine their coordination efforts and to exchange information about what worked or did not work well programmatically. At the district level, the teachers jointly participate in inservice activities aimed at promoting a more unified approach. The fact that Seaview Magnet's preschool and kindergarten teachers have taught at both classroom levels strengthens rapport between the two programs.

Despite the formal and informal communication and collaboration among Seaview's preschool, kindergarten, and other teachers, there is little communication with public or private preschool programs located outside the school. Similarly, no special transition activities are in place for children who attend preschool at Seaview Magnet but who then move on to some other school for kindergarten.

Transition Activities for Incoming Children and Families

In addition to kindergarten teachers' informal contact with parents and preschoolers, they offer a number of orientation meetings for parents in order to explain the how's and why's of Seaview's kindergarten program and to suggest ways in which parents can help further these efforts at home. Parents are informed of the developmental nature of the program and its goals, and the principal, teachers, and parents then discuss what each expects of the other. For example, parents are told that a high level of parent involvement is expected, more than in other schools. Kindergartners are gradually phased from half- to full-day attendance. Since most children are dropped at school each morning and picked up in the afternoon by a parent, the opportunity for daily contact also encourages continuity.

Continuity Beyond Kindergarten

As previously noted, PK-3 is treated as a single unit in terms of approach and materials. This, combined with multi-age K-6 classrooms and a shared developmental philosophy among teachers, promotes continuity as the child moves from kindergarten to first grade and beyond. That almost all of the children who attend kindergarten at Seaview Magnet remain at the school through the sixth grade also facilitates (and, to some extent, is indicative of) overall continuity.

Key Features of the Seaview Magnet School Program

Continuity at Seaview Magnet School is facilitated by the nature of the school's whole child, developmental focus. As a creative arts magnet school that primarily serves a minority, high poverty, inner-city PK-6 population, the school uses the arts, as well as its location, to build children's self-esteem and interest in school. The vision and commitment of the principal and teaching staff to a shared developmental perspective, together with the school's multi-age instructional grouping practices, serve an important role in providing continuity at Seaview Magnet. Strong parent involvement, partly owing to teachers' and the principal's articulation of this expectation and partly also to the parental choice aspects of magnet school enrollment, also facilitates smooth transitions for children.

The growing emphasis on early childhood education and increased funding of preschool programs by federal, state, and local governments resulted in the opening of two new preschool classrooms at Seaview Magnet this past year. The proximity of the preschool and kindergarten classrooms, the close collaboration among staff, and the high percentage of preschoolers who continue on to kindergarten and through the higher grades at the school are also key features of Seaview Magnet program. The school's track record of being at the vanguard of educational practices (in effect, what has long been in place there has now become the model for other district schools) has earned the school community recognition and greater latitude and flexibility than most other schools in the city enjoy.

CONTINUITY AT WESTSIDE SCHOOL

Program Context

Community and School District Characteristics

Near Westside School, the awning of a corner store displaying fresh fruit outside bears the words "West Indian Grocery" on one side and "Chinese Market" on the other; food and condiments inside reflect Chinese, Indian, and various Latino cuisines. The school is located in a transitional, crowded neighborhood in one of America's largest metropolises. The area is generally rundown and known for heavy drug abuse; streets are lined with mostly old and brick-fronted buildings, many of them with broken windows and covered by graffiti. Safety is a serious concern. When entering the school, one must first stop at a security desk, show identification, and receive a pass. Kindergarten children are no longer allowed to use the fenced-in playground across the street where swings, slides, and climbing bars are located.

The school district enrolls 34,357 children, including 3,700 full-day kindergartners. Racial/ethnic composition of the students is approximately 25% African-American, 61% Hispanic, 9% White, and 6% Asian or Pacific Islander. Some 73% qualify for reduced-price lunches; 80% are eligible for Chapter 1 services; and 16% are limited in their English proficiency.

The Elementary School

Westside School is a K-5 school whose enrollment since 1975 has grown from 400 to 1300, while its student turnover rate has dropped from 80% to 20% (though not necessarily because of lower family mobility, inasmuch as parents are legally permitted to keep their children enrolled at the school after leaving the neighborhood). Approximately 75% of the students are Hispanic, and 20% are African-American, reflecting the neighborhood population. Some 85% qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

Positive changes in the school climate at Westside School have also occurred during this same period, in part, resulting from the launching of a child-centered developmental K-3 curriculum, a conscientious attempt to welcome parents into the school and involve them as partners in their children's education, and closer attention to building appearance and to safety issues. Teachers have also been recruited who share the school's philosophy of early childhood education, and staff development programs were introduced to build teachers' capacities and interest in whole language and learning centers. These positive changes are reflected in the warm, caring, busy atmosphere of the school and, for example, in the children's work that lines the classroom walls and hallways.

The Westside School currently has 10 kindergarten classes that serve a total of 230 children. Classrooms are crowded, with several double kindergarten classes operating in large single classrooms, the result of a system-wide decision to move from half- to full-day kindergarten programs. Although many of the children are bilingual or limited-English-proficient, most child-

child and adult-child interactions observed during the site visit were in English. Two of the ten kindergarten classrooms are bilingual.

Feeder Preschools

Westside School houses no preschool classrooms. An estimated 60% of the incoming kindergartners have had no formal preschool experience. Most of the remaining kindergartners come from St. Paul's Head Start program, which is a half-day program designed to be developmental in approach. However, teachers' abilities to implement developmentally appropriate practices vary widely within this Head Start program. In these classrooms, informal communication among staff and children is in both Spanish and English, while more formal group activities (e.g., circle time) are conducted in English.

For the first time this year, a small number of entering kindergartners at Westside came from a recent preschool initiative of the city's Agency for Child Development and the Board of Education. Various private day care environments comprise the other source of Westside kindergartners.

Approach to Continuity

Structure

Key to Westside's commitment to offering a child-centered program is the recognition by administrators and teachers that "parents are an integral part of a child's education; the recognition by adults that all children are intrinsically motivated and capable of learning; that children are in a significant way in control of their learning; and the perception that learning is an ongoing, integrative process." These words from the district's mission statement translate into a policy of enrolling all children who make the age cut-off, with no performance prerequisites. "Readiness," according to one district administrator, "is an adult issue. It has nothing to do with children." Delaying kindergarten enrollment and retaining children in kindergarten are discouraged, both by district and building-level administrators.

Westside's transition activities are not formally evaluated; nor is its overall K-5 program, although children participate in the district-wide standard testing program. Informally, staff and parents are supportive of the school program, although kindergarten parents seemingly define success in terms of their children developing strong basic academic skills. Parents of preschoolers enrolled in Head Start (especially monolingual Spanish-speaking mothers) expressed appreciation for the training afforded them and reported that they feel more "at home" in that educational setting than did the parents of current Westside kindergartners who were interviewed. Most kindergarten parents believe their children lack readiness skills. Because most of these families are recent U.S. arrivals and have not yet had an opportunity to learn of the benefits afforded by the school's bilingual program, they tend to want to place their children in English-speaking kindergartens and feel able to provide sufficient Spanish instruction at home.

Transition

Staff from St. Paul's Head Start share records of individual children with

Activities with Preschool Programs/Staff

Westside kindergarten teachers in the fall, once the children have started kindergarten. Otherwise, there is little formal or informal communication between them. There is no evidence of any coordination between the school and the city's new preschool initiative.

Transition Activities for Incoming Children and Families

Transition activities at Westside School are not designed specifically to enhance the continuity between preschool and kindergarten programs, but rather to welcome parents and their children to the school and to familiarize them with the kindergarten program. The responsibility for transition activities for entering children and their parents rests with the school's principal and vice-principal.

Entering kindergartners and their parents are invited to a three-part orientation series during the spring. The first part involves a review of the philosophy of instruction at Westside and a visit to the kindergarten classrooms. Next, children and their parents are invited to attend a fair held in the school gym. Here, the teachers and educational assistants have transformed the gym into a gigantic early childhood classroom that both adults and children can experience. And finally, parents meet with the teachers and participate in "make it/take it" activities designed for use at home to help their children prepare for school.

Another important transition approach is the staggered beginning of the school year for kindergartners. Children begin kindergarten a few at a time, and their parents are encouraged to come and remain with them for at least an hour during the first few days to ease the transition.

Continuity Beyond Kindergarten

Continuity throughout the K-3 grades has received considerable attention at Westside. By means of a clear philosophical commitment to child-centered developmental education, strong building and district leadership, and competent teachers, the school makes a concerted effort to provide continuity. That the school accomplishes this goal is reflected in the fact that staff at Westside are recognized within the district as having gone beyond standard practices to foster a K-3 program that is especially child-centered and that relies on the use of activity centers in each classroom to promote developmental learning.

Key Features of the Westside School Program

Westside School enjoys a positive, caring atmosphere that contrasts sharply to the surrounding neighborhood. The principal, assistant principals, and head teachers are all committed to making grades K-3 reflect their (and the district's) child-centered philosophy as fully as possible. Overcrowding, however, creates additional stresses for teachers as they work to implement the school's philosophy in their classrooms. The determination to build interest and involvement among the ethnically-diverse parent body, many of whom are new immigrants, is key to Westside's efforts to achieve smooth transitions for young children. Special transition activities include an orientation series for incoming children and their parents, as well as staggered school-year beginning for kindergartners.

Continuity in the school's instructional approach to K-3 has been addressed, but with no preschool program housed at the school, little attention until now has been given to achieving better coordination with feeder preschool programs. Such coordination would be entirely consistent with the school's philosophical approach, but it remains a matter of resources and focus.

CONTINUITY AT SOUTHSIDE EARLY CHILDHOOD SCHOOL

Program Context

Community and School District Characteristics

Imageton is the third largest metropolitan area in this northeastern state. Its mixed economic base, bolstered by the corporate headquarters of a major company, a large university, and a school of technology, supports a well-educated and highly diverse populace.

The city school district serves 31,569 students. Approximately 56% of the students are African-Americans, 14% are Hispanic, 3% Asian or Pacific Islanders, and 0.3% American Indian or Native Alaskan. More than half (52%) are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. Chapter 1 services are currently provided to 12%. Nearly 10% are limited-English-proficient.

The Elementary School

Southside Early Childhood School is a PK-2 magnet school now in its third year of operation. Designed as a model early childhood center, it has benefitted from planning and funding superior to most of the city's schools. Of Southside's 250 students, 68% are African-American and 8% Hispanic; approximately 75% qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Some 22% receive Chapter 1 services. Only 1 student is limited in English proficiency.

Southside is located in an urban residential area, surrounded by small homes in a racially-mixed neighborhood. The school is housed in what once was a private school. Its main building is supplemented by a portable structure that accommodates the preschool and an office for the school's social worker and psychologist and the parent coordinator. Southside is a small, friendly school; its classrooms contain smiling, happy children, and its hallways display their colorful artwork and writing projects (including a "life-size" unicorn, the school mascot).

Three kindergarten classes enroll a total of 75 children and follow a child-centered, developmental approach, the philosophy upon which the school was founded. Each 25-student class is staffed by a teacher and an aide. A preschool teacher and an aide accommodate 36 preschoolers, with 18 students in each of two half-day sessions. The preschool takes the same developmental approach as the kindergartens. Indeed, the kindergartens and preschool use the same High/Scope curriculum and share the same books.

Feeder Preschools

Almost all Southside preschoolers continue on to kindergarten there. Since Southside is a magnet school, the other 60% of kindergartners come from a variety of neighborhoods and prior learning environments (preschools, daycare centers, and homes). Southside has little contact with those other sources, and kindergarten teachers frequently have no knowledge of students' preschool backgrounds.

Approach to Continuity

Structure

Smooth transitions -- the achievement of continuity between grade levels during the early childhood years -- are inherent to Southside's mission as an early childhood magnet school. The principal's major contribution to continuity was the initial planning and implementation of the model school, including the development of the school's child-centered approach and the adoption of its language-based curriculum, as well as selective teacher hiring practices aimed at building a cohesive staff that shares the same developmental perspective. The school's readiness policy reflects this. All age-eligible children are accepted into kindergarten; the preschool teacher does not have to teach all children a required set of skills, but instead, is encouraged to focus on children's individual strengths and on instilling in them a positive attitude toward school.

The teachers themselves are primarily responsible for enhancing continuity between preschool and kindergarten at Southside. The teachers frequently interact, both formally and informally, with each other -- in part due to the small size of the school, their shared philosophy of education, and the joint inservice activities provided by the district. They are also primarily responsible for involving parents, though the school's parent coordinator, principal, and other teachers assist them in that role.

Parent involvement at Southside plays an important role in continuity. At the recruitment fair where parents select the school, the principal asks parents to sign an agreement that they will come to the school at least once a month. The school also has a parent coordinator to encourage and sustain involvement, primarily through "make it/take it" workshops and focused discussion groups. Parent-teacher conferences are held each fall and spring for K-2 grade levels, and the preschool teacher meets monthly with parents to discuss their children's progress and new learning goals.

In a focus group conducted during the site visit, parents whose children had attended Southside preschool reported high satisfaction with the transition into kindergarten. Parents whose children had not attended the Southside preschool, however, were less than satisfied, noting that the school could have done more to help ease the transition, that the structure of the school was imposed too soon in kindergarten, and that the children were not greeted individually. Nevertheless, these same parents expressed how very pleased they are with the school overall, and most said they wished their children had attended Southside preschool to avoid the transition problems discussed. Aware of this discontinuity, the district is now working towards improving communication between the various school kindergartens and feeder preschool programs in the district.

Transition Activities with Preschool Programs/Staff

Southside preschool and kindergarten teachers confer at the end of the academic year concerning each child's progress. The focus of these conversations has evolved over the past two years from that of the child's problems to what it is that works well for the child. The preschool teacher's observation sheet for each child is similarly passed on to the kindergarten teacher. These sheets are also passed on to kindergarten teachers outside of Southside -- the sole routine information-sharing procedure with outside schools. Southside kindergarten teachers may or may not receive comparable observations about incoming children from other preschool programs.

Transition Activities for Incoming Children and Families

Southside preschoolers have contact with the kindergarten classes throughout the year through activities such as joint field trips. Towards the end of the spring term, they make a formal visit to the kindergarten classes. An orientation for parents of both Southside preschoolers and of children from other preschool environments is held in May, at which gathering parents of former Southside kindergartners talk with the new parents and the teachers describe how their classes operate. The school also holds an open house in the fall for parents to visit their children's classroom and teachers.

Continuity Beyond Kindergarten

The importance of continuity throughout the grades is stressed to parents, and approximately 90% of kindergartners remain at Southside through first and second grades. Continuity beyond kindergarten is provided in much the same way as continuity into kindergarten: by stressing a continuous, language-based curriculum; by encouraging collaboration among teachers; and by providing children contact with teachers other than their own. A recent school-administered survey of parents, aimed at eliciting their concerns and level of satisfaction with the school, did not find that the transition between grades was a concern.

Nevertheless, as children leave second grade and necessarily move on to another school for third grade, unresolved issues of continuity again surface. The transfer of information is easier at this grade level, since clear procedures are formally in place in most schools and districts (in contrast to the less formalized procedures of many preschool establishments), but there have been only limited efforts towards enhancing continuity in vital areas such as parent orientation, curriculum articulation, and standard assessments once the children leave the school. Southside teachers are now beginning to address the issue of student transfer in an effort to improve continuity.

Key Features of the Southside Program

Southside Early Childhood School has certain advantages over most other schools. Planned as a model school, it enjoys funding and independence superior to most schools of similar size and demographics. The principal and teaching staff share a child-centered vision. Strong leadership, parent involvement, collaboration between staff across grades, a continuous and language-based curriculum, and a common developmental perspective all contribute to the school's ability to provide continuity to a high minority, high poverty population.

For Southside preschoolers who remain at the school for kindergarten, continuity is assured; for students coming from outside Southside, continuity is largely serendipitous. The transition of second-graders out of the school also poses difficulty. However, both the school and the district are working towards resolution of these discontinuities. For example, next year the school will implement multi-age groupings, collaborate with a local day care/ preschool on a before- and after-school program, and participate in district-wide meetings of teachers to discuss the issues surrounding student transfer and continuity in the upper grades.

CONTINUITY AT PIONEER PRIMARY SCHOOL

Program Context

Community and School District Characteristics

Smallville is a town of 4,000 residents, situated in a primarily agricultural area of the northeastern section of one of the southern states. The sandy loam soil supports stands of large pine trees between fields of cotton, soybeans, and tobacco. While not a seriously impoverished community, visible signs of hurricane Hugo remain, and economic growth is thought of in terms of the new Econolodge motel and a McDonalds, as well as the proposed construction of a state maximum security prison and huge county landfill just outside of town.

The school district serves 3,729 students from Smallville and the surrounding rural areas, many of which are poor and relatively isolated. Approximately 85% of the district's students are African-Americans. Some 72% qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, and 34% are eligible for Chapter 1 services.

The Elementary School

Pioneer Primary School enrolls 793 students in grade PK-3. There is an approximate 3:1 ratio of African-American students to white students, with 77% qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches and 31% receiving Chapter 1 services.

The school is housed in a one-story brick construction that has had several additions to the original 1950's building. Located near the end of a residential street a few blocks off the main street of town, the school grounds are expansive and well-kept. The overall atmosphere of the school is pleasant and inviting. The children appear to be cheerful and to enjoy being in school. Daily events seem well organized, and the school office is the center of communication and activity for staff and parents. A door to the principal's office, which opens onto the hallway, was never seen to be shut.

Six half-day (morning and afternoon) kindergarten classes accommodate some 180 children, with one teacher and an aide per class of 30 students. Pioneer also operates four half-day preschool classes that serve a total of 80 children. Each preschool class of 20 children is staffed by one teacher and an aide. The preschool classes are the result of a statewide effort to provide early childhood education to educationally disadvantaged students.

Feeder Preschools

About half of the school's entering kindergartners attended preschool there. Head Start is the second largest feeder program; it lacks many of the resources available to the public school pre-kindergarten programs. Pioneer Primary's kindergarten may also draw a few children each year from the Groveton Child Care Center, a privately owned, NAEYC-accredited facility located in a neighboring town some 15 miles away but still within the school district. Most of Pioneer Primary's remaining kindergartners come from family day care or at-home care environments.

Approach to Continuity

Structure

The superintendent and an early childhood specialist on his staff provide leadership for the district's commitment to developmental learning. This responsibility is taken seriously, though leadership is to some extent shared with a district early childhood committee, whose membership includes two elementary school principals and two teachers/ supervisors.

Use of the High/Scope curriculum is required of all state-funded programs for 4-year-olds. Two of Pioneer Primary School's preschool teachers were the first to use the curriculum within the district's schools; they are credited with having led the way in terms of promoting developmentally appropriate practices at the classroom level, and they assisted in training the kindergarten and transition program teachers to use the model curriculum. Their efforts, aided by the principal, won the support of the district early childhood committee, and the superintendent subsequently mandated district-wide use of the curriculum for all kindergarten programs. Use of the High/Scope curriculum at both the preschool and kindergarten levels thus provides an important element of continuity.

The approach to readiness at Pioneer Primary School follows a continuum from a child's entry into a pre-kindergarten class through first grade. All age-eligible children are accepted into kindergarten, but there is a strong sense that it is the kindergarten teacher's responsibility to prepare children for the first-grade curriculum. Children are tested at the end of the kindergarten year, and some 40% are placed into a transition class: Of these, most (75%) will then go on to first grade after the transition year, and the remainder will advance directly to second grade. Placement in the transition class is based primarily on the state standardized test results, although teacher recommendations are taken into consideration.

There has been no formal evaluation of Pioneer Primary's early childhood program or the transition activities carried out by the school. Based on classroom observations, teacher evaluation, and extensive interaction with parents, the principal believes that teachers, parents, and children are all positive about the school's overall program and its approach to continuity.

Transition Activities with Preschool Programs/Staff

Pioneer Primary's preschool, kindergarten, and first-grade teachers communicate with each other concerning children who are to be placed in their classes. Students' folders, which contain test results, report cards, and parental information, are also passed on by the teachers from grade to grade.

Although there have been some efforts to plan kindergarten orientation activities with local Head Start programs, little progress towards such collaboration has been made. However, preschoolers who attend the Groveton Child Care Center make orientation visits to the Pioneer Primary School, and Center staff send the school narrative reports of each child's preschool experience. This year the Center was used as one of Pioneer Primary's preschool screening sites. It is also important to note that both the Center and Head Start programs follow the High/Scope curriculum.

Transition Activities for Incoming Children and Families

Pioneer Primary's preschool and kindergarten children visit kindergarten and first-grade classrooms in the spring. The teachers also talk with the children, their parents, and each other about the kinds of adjustments or difficulties that might be experienced in the coming year. Parents are provided some orientation to the school when they bring their children in for preschool screening or kindergarten registration.

Parent involvement at Pioneer Primary centers on using parents as volunteers in the classroom or on field trips, but teachers interviewed spoke of the difficulty of getting parents into the school. Preschool teachers make home visits twice a year, and kindergarten and first-grade teachers schedule a minimum of two parent conferences per year. Parent participation in these is somewhat less than 50%, though parent attendance at PTA meetings in which students also participate appears to be good (over 50% of preschoolers' parents participate).

Continuity Beyond Kindergarten

The transition class, which provides an extra year for kindergartners deemed not yet ready to enter first grade, is an essential tool for achieving K-2 continuity at the school. First-grade teachers add fun to the kindergarten-leaving process: They make a videotape of life in first grade as a "preview of things to come." Smooth transitions beyond kindergarten also rely on the high level of commitment and communication among teachers, who are expected to care about and contribute to each child's continuing success, and on the active support and involvement of parents, particularly those who participate on the state-mandated school improvement council. However, kindergarten teachers report little formal contact with second- and third-grade staff, though they assume the first-grade teachers provide the kind of information about children's skills that facilitates homogeneous grouping.

Key Features of the Pioneer Primary Program

Pioneer Primary School provides a unique example of building-level, district-wide, and state mandated efforts to implement a developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum (in this case, the High/Scope model). The school's pre-kindergarten program, now completing its seventh year of existence, was created by state funding, and like all state-funded programs for

4-year-olds, initiated use of the High/Scope curriculum at Pioneer. The preschool teachers, through the auspices of the district's early childhood committee, prevailed upon the superintendent and his staff to extend the High/Scope mandate to include kindergarten. Initially viewed with some reluctance and skepticism by kindergarten and first-grade teachers, the curriculum has nevertheless been implemented and institutionalized.

Although little coordination exists with preschool programs outside the school, kindergartners coming to Pioneer from Head Start or other publicly funded preschool programs, as well as from the private Groveton Child Care Center, may well experience some level of built-in curricular continuity because of the common use of the High/Scope curriculum by these programs.

CONTINUITY AT BEAR VALLEY SCHOOL

Program Context

Community and School District Characteristics

Bear Valley is a suburban area, located across the bridge from a northwestern city. Providing housing for shipyard workers during World War II, Bear Valley today feels more like a small, working-class town than a suburb. Indeed, many of its residents grew up and are employed there. The Bear Valley school district serves some 16,000 students in 21 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, and 3 high schools.

The Elementary School

Bear Valley Elementary is the smallest of the town's public elementary schools, serving 236 students in grades K-6. Almost all the students are white; 75% of them receive free or reduced-price lunches.

The school is located at the edge of the city, in an area that over the last few years has been changing from agricultural to industrial. Like most of the city's schools, the building is of World War II vintage; it is a low, green-shingled structure that sits among trees and faces a park. The first impression on entering the building is that of a busy, happy, friendly school, with students' work prominently displayed in classrooms, hallways, and the school office, alongside banners featuring recent historical figures, many of them black or female.

Two morning kindergarten classes serve a total of 45 students. Fifteen of the children have been identified as "at risk" and are enrolled in an extended-day program supported by state compensatory education funds and staffed by a third kindergarten teacher. Ten other kindergartners attend the district's special education preschool in the afternoons. All kindergartners are provided breakfast and lunch. District kindergarten programs have a developmental focus, and Bear Valley's program is especially dedicated to this emphasis. The three kindergarten teachers work and plan together.

Students in the afternoon (extended-day) kindergarten benefit from pre-teaching and re-teaching of the concepts introduced in the morning kindergarten; once a week they also participate in a special gross motor skills development program staffed by volunteers from a local business. There is a strong parent component to the afternoon program. Every other week, parents are invited to meet with the school counselor for lunch, followed by a short meeting focusing on parenting skills. Afterwards, parents participate with their children in the classroom, where they observe teachers modeling behaviors and teaching techniques; parents then have an opportunity to practice these behaviors themselves, both in the classroom and later at home. Lunch is provided parents free of charge, and volunteers from a community organization provide child care for kindergartners' younger siblings.

Attendance typically ranges from 6 to 17 parents per meeting, with some attending regularly, others only occasionally.

Feeder Preschools

Bear Valley School has no pre-kindergarten programs. Its kindergartners usually have attended either the county Head Start program or the district's special education preschool, or they have had no prior formal pre-kindergarten experience. This year the Bear Valley School kindergarten staff found that, except for two students, children who previously attended the Head Start preschool were not among the children identified as at risk upon entering the kindergarten program. Accordingly, kindergarten staff are now working with the county Head Start office to find ways to encourage parents of preschool-age children in the Bear Valley School attendance area to enroll their children in Head Start.

Approach to Continuity

Structure

At Bear Valley School, continuity is a product of the holistic approach taken by the school. The principal and teachers work together, within the context of a developmental, child-centered educational climate, to ensure that all the needs of children are addressed. The school views health, food, decent clothing, safety, and support for parents as necessary to the academic success of children, and it attempts to provide all of these support services in addition to its regular educational program. The principal provides strong leadership in finding resources in the community to meet these additional needs. Commented one district administrator, "They see a need, and they organize around it."

Examples of Bear Valley School's efforts to respond to the needs of the whole child include its breakfast and lunch program for kindergarten students and a "clothes closet" with shoes and jackets for ten cents. Early each fall, a health fair is conducted, and children are given the physical examinations required for school entrance. Throughout the school year, a nurse practitioner from the Department of Health provides free medical care at the school once a week. Parenting classes, led by the school counselor, are offered to empower parents and enable them to take a more active role in their children's education. (School staff realize that many of these parents need to overcome negative experiences from their own school days before they can become active partners with the schools.)

Transition Activities with Preschool Programs/Staff

Coordination between community preschools and the Bear Valley School's kindergarten program occurs on several levels. Preschool teachers are active members of the county kindergarten association: The district at-risk committee, which focuses on the needs of students in the five elementary buildings that serve the largest at-risk populations, also includes representatives from the preschools. In addition, preschool and kindergarten teachers communicate on an informal, as-needed basis concerning specific children.

Transition Activities for Incoming Children and Families

Each spring, Bear Valley School provides an orientation for prospective kindergartners and their parents. While the children are visiting the kindergarten classrooms, parents are treated to a videotape about kindergarten (written and produced by the kindergarten staff) and meet with the principal and school nurse, who answer their questions and generally explain how the kindergarten classes function. In the fall, a health fair is held, during which incoming kindergartners are screened for special education needs and receive the required physical examinations (including immunizations). A few weeks after school begins, parents visit children's classrooms at a scheduled open house.

Continuity Beyond Kindergarten

To ensure continuity beyond kindergarten, Bear Valley School's first-grade classes continue to use the kindergarten program's developmental approach. The first-grade curriculum is adjusted to individual students' learning levels. It is thus understood that for a number of students, the first-grade curriculum will be more like kindergarten, and the second-grade curriculum will be something more like first grade. The hope is that students catch up to their peers by third grade. The school's whole-language curriculum is also intended to facilitate continuity. For instance, children in grades 1-3 spend part of their reading time in a whole-language computer lab, where multi-age instructional grouping is employed.

Another facet of Bear Valley School's approach to continuity beyond kindergarten is its use of the same kind of lunchtime parent group that originated with last year's extended-day kindergarten program. Now that the children of those original kindergarten parents have moved up a grade, the same parents constitute the new first-grade parent group. In this manner, the school intends to establish parent groups at each grade level.

Key Features of the Bear Valley School Program

At the Bear Valley School, continuity is integrally tied to the school's holistic educational perspective -- i.e., continuity is achieved by providing children with essential tools for learning, including health, food, safety, parent involvement, support for parents, dedicated teachers and administrators, and a developmental curriculum geared to enable all children to achieve success. The principal's strong leadership, together with shared ownership of the school's child-centered approach by the entire staff, also facilitates continuity from grades K-6. Even though the school has no pre-kindergarten programs of its own, it collaborates with Head Start and other preschool programs. The county kindergarten association and district at-risk committee, among other mechanisms, promote formal and informal contact among the teachers.

A unique feature of the Bear Valley School program is its numerous school-community partnerships. The telephone company, for example, provides teddy bears as student rewards for improvement; volunteers from a fast-food company conduct a weekly motor skills development program for extended-day kindergartners; and other community volunteers care for kindergartners' younger siblings so parents can visit classrooms.

APPENDIX C: METHODOLOGY: SAMPLING, SURVEY METHODS, CHARACTERISTICS OF DISTRICT AND SCHOOL SAMPLES, AND SITE VISIT METHODS

Potential Respondent Universes and Approaches to Sampling
Stratification and Sampling of LEAs
Sampling of Schools
Mail Surveys
Calculating Sample Weights
Descriptions of Actual District and School Samples
Site Visit Methodology

APPENDIX C. METHODOLOGY: SAMPLING, SURVEY METHODS, CHARACTERISTICS OF DISTRICT AND SCHOOL SAMPLES, AND SITE VISIT METHODS

Potential Respondent Universes and Approaches to Sampling

Survey Sampling

Beginning with a database of all public school districts and schools in the U.S. (that have kindergartens) obtained from Quality Education Data (QED) of Denver, Colorado, we first selected a stratified random sample of districts using a probability-proportional-to-size procedure (to ensure representation of large districts). We oversampled higher-poverty districts so that we would have a large enough sample of them for reliable national estimates. Two schools with kindergarten classes were then randomly selected from each sampled district (unless the district had only one such school). These procedures gave us a sample of 1,003 districts and 1,662 schools.

Because sample probabilities and return rates differed across the cells of the design (three sizes by three levels of poverty), we weighted the data before conducting the analysis. This means that all survey findings are immediately generalizable (within a given margin of error) to U.S. public schools and districts with kindergartens. The sampling and weighting are described next.

Respondent Universes

The following table shows the approximate size of the potential respondent universes with the sample size for each survey.

Table C-1: Respondent Universe and Sample Sizes

	Respondent Universe	Sample Size
Local Education Agencies (Districts)	14,336	1,003
Schools With Kindergarten Classes	67,437	1,662

Sampling Design

The sampling design for this study had two primary objectives: (a) to provide reliable national estimates of the extent and nature of transition programs in public elementary schools; and (b) to provide reliable national estimates of transition policies and administration for public school districts (LEAs). A secondary, but important objective was to provide these school and LEA estimates for LEAs within each of nine categories representing different combinations of enrollment size and percentage of disadvantaged students. A final consideration was that these estimates should be representative of four geographical regions of the United States.

The sampling design was a stratified two-stage sample. In the first stage, a stratified, probability proportionate to size (PPS) sample of LEAs was drawn. The sampling frame of LEAs was organized into 36 strata defined by the four geographic census regions (Northeast, Midwest, South and West), three ranges of LEA enrollment, and three ranges of percentage of disadvantaged students served.

The second stage was a simple random sample of elementary schools from each of the sampled LEAs, except for those LEAs where the schools exhibited considerable variation in the percentage of disadvantaged students. In these exceptional cases, the second stage sample of schools was stratified to ensure representation of the distribution of disadvantaged students.

Stratification and Sampling of LEAs

The first stage sampling frame consisted of LEAs that had at least one school with kindergarten classes. A data file (1989 update) obtained from Quality Education Data (QED) of Denver, Colorado, contained records for 14,336 LEAs with a grade span code that included K, e.g., "K-13" or "Elementary Only." The number of elementary schools in these districts was used as the measure of size for determining sampling probabilities.

Stratification by Size and Poverty Level

As noted above, reliable national estimates were desired for all LEAs overall and for LEAs in the following categories:

- three enrollment size categories (small, medium and large);
- three poverty levels (percentage of disadvantaged students served -- low, medium and high); and
- nine categories formed by cross-classifying the three enrollment sizes and the three levels of poverty.

Definitions of the three levels of district enrollment size based on the QED data are shown in Table C-2.

Table C-2: District Enrollment Size Strata

Size	Enrollment	LEAs Number	LEAs Percent
Small	fewer than 1,000	7,373	51.4%
Medium	1,000 - 4,999	5,402	37.7%
Large	5,000 or more	1,561	10.9%
Total		14,336	100.0%

The three levels of district poverty were defined by QED in terms of the 1980 census percentage of school-age children in the LEA whose family income was under the poverty income level. The definition of a high level of poverty was more than 25% of school-age children below the poverty income level. A moderate poverty level was between 11 and 25%, and a low poverty level was 10% or lower. The numbers and percentages of LEAs in these categories are shown in Table C-3.

Table C-3: District Poverty Level Strata

Poverty Level	Percentage Below Poverty Income Level	LEAs Number	LEAs Percent
Low	10% or less	6,028	42.0%
Moderate	11% - 25%	6,364	44.4%
High	More than 25%	1,944	13.6%
Total		14,336	100.0%

Table C-4 shows how these LEAs are distributed across the nine size-by-poverty-level cells of the design.

Table C-4: Number and Percent of School Districts (LEAs) in the Nine Cells of the Sampling Design

		LEA Enrollment Size			
		Small	Medium	Large	TOTAL
Poverty Level	Low	2,680 18.69%	2,659 18.55%	689 4.81%	6,028 42.05%
	Moderate	3,460 24.14%	2,196 15.32%	708 4.94%	6,364 44.39%
	High	1,233 8.60%	547 3.82%	164 1.14%	1944 13.56%
	TOTAL	7,373 51.43%	5,402 37.68%	1,561 10.89%	14,336 100.00%

Determining Sample Size

The sample size of LEAs needed to satisfy the estimation objectives was determined by establishing a minimum sample size for the most disaggregated level of the design, namely the nine cross-classifications of enrollment size and poverty level, and summing across these nine categories to obtain the total sample size required. This procedure was carried out for the case where one wants to estimate a national **percentage** within some margin of error with a specified level of confidence. The values assumed for this procedure were (a) the sample percentage estimate is 50% (the most conservative case); (b) the level of confidence is 95%; and (c) an acceptable margin of error for any one of the nine size-poverty categories is plus or minus 10% (the margin of error for less disaggregated levels would be smaller).

Using these assumed values, the minimum sample size required was 96 LEAs in each of the nine size-poverty strata. That is, if at least 96 LEAs in each stratum responded to a survey question and the sample estimate of the percentage responding in a certain way was 50%, one could be 95% confident that the national percentage is between 40 and 60%. Based on an 85% response rate, a sample of 113 LEAs had to be drawn from each of these categories. Thus, a total sample of at least 1,017 (113 x 9 categories) LEAs was required. A sample of 1,017 districts was drawn in the manner described below. However, unforseen difficulties with some of the districts selected reduced the effective sample size to 1,003. In some cases, the same district was sampled twice, stemming from the fact that the LEA was listed twice, with two different superintendents, in the QED database. In other cases, when the school sample was drawn, it became apparent that the districts had no schools with kindergarten programs (that is, they were mistakenly included in the QED list of districts with kindergarten programs). By the time these problems were uncovered it was not possible to replace the affected districts in the sample. Thus, the effective district sample size was 1,003.

Implementation of Sampling Strategy

In order to implement the PPS selection of 113 LEAs in each of the nine size-poverty strata, this number was allocated to the four census regions in proportion to the total number of elementary schools in each region, yielding a total of 36 strata from which to sample. For each of the 36 strata, a systematic PPS selection interval was computed. This interval equalled the number of elementary schools in each stratum divided by the number of LEAs to be sampled. Then, within each stratum, the LEAs were listed in random order. The measure of size was cumulated within each stratum. Beginning at a randomly selected point in a stratum, the selection interval was used to identify the next sample LEA until the required number of sample LEAs had been selected from the entire list. Any large LEA whose number of elementary schools exceeded the selection interval was included in the sample with certainty. This ensured that the largest LEAs, such as New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles, were included in the sample.

Estimation Error

With this sample size, the margin of error for estimating percentages in each of the nine poverty-by-size strata is 10%, as mentioned above. For each of the four census regions, the error is 6.5%. For each of the three enrollment sizes and poverty level strata, the error is about 5.8%. For overall national estimates, the margin of error is 3.3%.

Sampling of Schools

Reliable elementary school-level estimates regarding the extent and nature of transition were viewed as more important than the LEA-level estimates because the actual transition activities are more likely to be implemented at the school level. Estimates were needed at the national level, for each geographic region and for the three enrollment sizes and three poverty levels -- separately and cross-classified.

Sampling Frame

A sampling frame of all elementary schools with kindergarten programs in each of the 1,003 sample LEAs was created. A data file maintained by QED with building level data was employed to identify only those schools coded as K-3, K-6, K-8, or K-12. According to QED, the 14,336 LEAs identified above contain an average of about 4.7 elementary schools with kindergartens, or about 67,400 in all.

Elementary schools within LEAs were selected in a simple random fashion. Except for the approximately 223 small LEAs with only one elementary school, two elementary schools were sampled from each LEA. This means a total of 1,662 schools were sampled. Based on an 85% response rate, 1,412 schools were expected to respond.

Estimation Error

The expected margin of error for estimating a percentage from school survey returns is about 7.2% for each of the six medium and large size-poverty categories, while for each of the three small size-poverty categories, it is around 8.6%. For each of the three size and the three poverty-level categories, this error is around 4.4%. For each of the four census regions it averages 5.2%. Finally, the overall responding sample of 1,169 schools yields a very small margin of error -- about 2.5%.

Mail Surveys

Initial Mailing of Surveys

We mailed district surveys to 1,003 districts on October 24, 1989. The survey form and an accompanying cover letter from the U.S. Department of Education were addressed to the superintendent by name; a prepaid, pre-addressed return envelope was also included. The letter asked the superintendent either to complete the survey form or to give it to the appropriate administrator to complete. In fact, 41% of district surveys were completed by the superintendent, 31% by another central office administrator, 20% by an elementary school principal, 5% by other elementary school staff, and 1% by "other."

School surveys were mailed to 1,662 schools on November 2, 1989, one week following the mailing of the district surveys. The school surveys were addressed to the building principal by name, and 84% were actually completed by the principal. Because all schools in the sample were within districts selected for the district sample, the superintendent was given advance notice of this mailing.

Maximizing Response Rates

Three weeks after the initial mailing of each survey, we sent reminder postcards to all districts and schools that had not returned completed surveys. The district postcards were mailed November 13, and the school postcards were mailed November 23. Beginning December 11, phone calls were initiated to districts and schools that had not returned the survey. Prior to the December holidays, 206 districts and 282 schools were reached with these reminder phone calls. Calling was halted for the holidays because of the difficulty of reaching schools and districts. The week of December 26, all non-respondents were mailed a new set of survey materials along with a letter stressing the importance of their prompt return of the survey.

These initial follow-up efforts were moderately successful, increasing the district return rate from 59% on December 18 to 68% on January 10, and increasing the school return rate from 49% to 54% over the same period. Nonetheless, it was becoming apparent that if the desired 85% return rates were to be achieved, more intensive measures would have to be taken. Accordingly, in February it was decided that telephone interviews would be used to supplement the mail surveys. A team of four trained telephone interviewers began this calling on February 12. The telephone interviewing focused initially on district surveys, because they were shorter and could be completed more easily than the school surveys. As of March 2, we had completed 374 telephone calls to districts and conducted 70 district surveys over the phone. Additionally, districts that did not want to complete the survey over the telephone were sent new surveys, of which 13 were returned.

Thus, a total of 83 returned district surveys can be attributed to this intensive telephone follow-up.

Schools that had not returned the survey were also contacted by phone. To increase the number of districts in which both the district survey and a school survey were returned, this effort focused first on schools in districts that had returned surveys. Initially, schools were asked to return their survey in the mail; if necessary, a new survey was mailed to the school. As a result of these calls, additional copies of surveys were mailed to 205 schools, with 81 of them returning the completed survey.

Since the overall school return rate was still unsatisfactory, telephone interviews were attempted with schools that had still failed to return a survey. From March 2 to March 20, we contacted 498 schools and asked them to complete the survey over the telephone, which we did with 39. In addition, 92 schools returned the survey in the mail following this final contact.

The following table shows the return rates over time for the district and the school surveys. Without the intensive follow-up activities, the return rate would have been closer to 60%.

Table C-5: Survey Return Rates Over Time

Date	District (base = 1,003)	School (base = 1,662)
November 27, 1989	48%	33%
December 18, 1989	59%	49%
December 30, 1989	60%	50%
January 10, 1990	68%	54%
February 5, 1990	75%	63%
February 28, 1990	83%	70%
March 19, 1990	85%	76%
March 31, 1990	85%	78%

The final figures represent 846 district and 1,298 school surveys returned. The percentages of responding districts and schools in each cell of the design closely match the percentages in the intended sample. (See "Description of Actual District and School Samples," below.)

Tracking Survey Returns

As district and school surveys were received, data entry staff checked them off in databases listing all the districts and schools for the sample. These district and school databases were then used to calculate the respective response rates over time and to identify non-respondents for further contact, as described above. Through linking the databases, we determined whether each district's school(s) had returned completed surveys, and used this information to guide the follow-up procedures, as described above.

Ensuring Completeness and Accuracy of Data

Integrity of the databases was enhanced by first ensuring that the surveys were complete and accurate, and second by ensuring that the databases accurately reflected survey responses. First, we manually inspected all survey forms for completeness. If any items were left blank or answered in a fashion inconsistent with other items (e.g., ethnic groups not summing to total enrollment), the respondent was telephoned. The need for complete and accurate data was stressed; however, if the respondent still could not complete the item (e.g., if the question truly did not apply), the item was left blank.

We also used computerized data-verification procedures to further enhance the accuracy of the data. First, as data were entered, they were automatically checked to ensure that the entered value for each item fell in an appropriate range. Second, if a response was given that led the respondent to skip over certain items, the data entry procedure automatically skipped to the next appropriate item, facilitating data entry. Finally, all surveys were entered twice, in two independent files, which we then compared to each other. Data entry staff resolved any discrepancies by referring to the original survey.

Calculating Sample Weights[1]

Each of the responding districts and schools was assigned a weight in order to allow for generalizations from the two samples to the respective target populations. The weighting methodology made use of standard weighting procedures, namely weighting by the inverse of the probability of selection, with an adjustment for non-response. In addition, the district weights were adjusted because not all respondents were eligible for inclusion; the school weights were adjusted for this reason and also because the schools were originally sampled in a two-stage process. A description of the weighting and adjustments for the districts and schools follows.

Weights for District Surveys

As a first step, each of the 1,003 districts sampled received a basic sampling weight equal to the reciprocal of its probability of selection. This probability of selection was a function of: (1) which of the nine primary strata (three levels of poverty by three levels of district enrollment) the district was in; and (2) the district enrollment, the square root of which was used as the measure of size for the probability proportional to size sampling approach that was taken. (See "Implementation of Sampling Strategy" above.)

As a second step, this basic sampling weight was adjusted for non-respondents. This adjustment eliminates the underestimation of population totals that would occur if the responding districts were thought to represent the entire sample, including non-respondents. In the present case, this adjustment is complicated by the fact that a small percentage of responding districts were ineligible for inclusion in the sample. Eligible districts are those that reported having one or more schools with a kindergarten. Ineligible districts reported having no schools with a kindergarten. First, these districts were not given weights, since they should not have been in the sample. Second, their existence implies that some of the non-responding districts were also ineligible; therefore, the manner in which the weights for the responding, eligible districts were adjusted for non-response also had to be changed slightly. The following section describes these adjustments.

Upon completion of the survey data collection, each of the 1,003 districts was classified into one of three return categories:

Returned Questionnaire, Eligible District	830
Returned Questionnaire, Ineligible District	16
Questionnaire Not Returned, Eligibility Status Unknown	157
	1,003

For districts that did not return the survey, it is unknown if they have any schools with kindergartens; their eligibility was estimated, as follows.

The degree to which the non-responding districts were assumed to be eligible was calculated separately for each of the nine strata, for greater precision. Within each stratum an enrollment-based weighted eligibility rate was calculated by dividing the total weighted enrollment of the eligible responding districts by the total weighted enrollment of all responding districts, eligible and ineligible. (For each of the nine strata, this eligibility rate was greater than 95%, reflecting the fact that only a small percentage -- 16 of 846 (1.9%) overall -- of the responding districts were ineligible.)

Within each stratum, this rate was multiplied by the weighted enrollment of the non-responding districts to produce an estimated eligible weighted enrollment of the non-responding districts. This estimated eligible weighted enrollment of the non-responding districts, rather than the larger weighted enrollment of all non-responding districts, was used in adjusting for non-response the weights of the responding, eligible districts. In this way, a slight downward adjustment was made for the fact that not all responding districts were eligible and the resulting assumption that not all non-responding districts would have been eligible, had they responded. The basic sampling weights for the responding, eligible districts were adjusted upward to account for non-response (using a ratio-adjustment), but not quite as far upward as they would have been if the problem of ineligible districts had not arisen. Thus, as desired, the responding eligible districts do not represent non-responding districts assumed ineligible.

Comparison of Weighted Counts with QED Data

After these adjustments were made, the third and final step in the district weighting process involved comparing the weighted count of districts with the total count of districts in the QED sampling frame. Again, this process was done stratum by stratum for greater precision. One would expect the sampling frame count to be greater than or equal to the weighted count, because the frame contains some ineligible districts. This was the case for all nine strata. The final weighted counts are shown below.

Table C-6: Comparison of Weighted Counts from Returned Surveys with Counts from QED Database

Stratum					
Enrollment Category	**Poverty Category**	**Weighted Count of Districts**	**QED Count of Districts**	**Weighted Enrollment**	**QED Enrollment**
Small	High	1,215	1,349	388,966	395,450
Small	Medium	2,904	3,326	1,304,597	1,322,865
Small	Low	2,320	2,666	981,798	1,047,419
Medium	High	576	608	1,436,564	1,465,285
Medium	Medium	2,028	2,145	4,551,663	4,699,038
Medium	Low	2,667	2,668	6,003,985	6,165,426
Large	High	180	193	4,675,813	4,692,267
Large	Medium	637	681	11,194,647	11,388,295
Large	Low	635	688	8,178,382	8,510,091
TOTAL		13,162	14,324	38,716,415	39,686,136

Weights for School Surveys

The school weighting calculations required a two-step process because the districts were sampled nationally and then schools were sampled within the districts. Therefore, two components were calculated and subsequently multiplied, as follows.

The first step in the school weighting process was the recalculation of the district weight for each of the 897 districts with at least one school responding. The 830 district weights calculated above were not satisfactory, since there was not a perfect match between responding districts and districts with at least one responding school. Therefore, the 897 district weights were adjusted by a ratio of the total of the final adjusted district weighted enrollment divided by the total of the basic sampling weights times enrollment for districts with at least one responding school. (Districts that did not respond but had at least one school respond would not have undergone the district weighting adjustments discussed above, so their "recalculated district weights" were the same as their basic sampling weights.)

The second step in the school weighting process was the calculation of the within-district component. This component is necessitated by the existence of ineligible responding schools, a situation similar to that of the districts. The return status distribution of the 1,662 sampled schools is as follows:

Returned Questionnaire, Eligible School	1,169
Returned Questionnaire, Ineligible School	129
Questionnaire Not Returned, Eligibility Status Unknown	364
	1,662

The within-district component was calculated by multiplying the number of schools in the district according to the sampling frame by the proportion of the district's responding schools that were eligible (0.00, 0.50, or 1.00 when two schools responded and 0.00 or 1.00 when one school responded). This product was then divided by the number of eligible responding schools in the district to calculate the within-district component for each of those schools. For instance, if a district was thought to have 20 schools, and both schools that were sampled returned surveys and were eligible, each school's within-district component would be 10, and the total within-district weight component would sum to 20. (The proportion of eligible schools would be 2/2 or 1.00; 20 x 1.00 = 20; 20/2 = 10, for each school.) However, if for this same 20-school district only one of the two responding schools was eligible, that school's within-district component would be 10, which would also be the district total. (The proportion of eligible schools would be 1/2 or 0.50; 20 x 0.50 = 10; 10/1 = 10, for that school alone.)

This within-district component was calculated separately for each district, not for each stratum. Although the eligibility rate for a given district was based on at most two schools and therefore subject to fairly high sampling error, this error was random and would tend to cancel out, leaving this approach more precise than if the eligibility rate were calculated at the stratum level.

Once the within-district component was calculated, it was multiplied by the recalculated district weight described above. The product served as the final weight for the 1,169 responding eligible schools. The weighted count of schools with kindergartens equals 43,551. This weighting approach reflected the two-stage sampling of schools, wherein districts were sampled in a national stratified sample and then schools were sampled randomly within each district.

Descriptions of Actual District and School Samples

Earlier sections of this appendix described the intended samples. The actual district and school samples, based on analysis of returned surveys, closely reflect these intentions. Here we describe the samples in terms of enrollment, poverty level, racial/ethnic group distribution, English proficiency of students, Chapter 1 eligibility, urban/rural settings, and grade-level configurations.

District and School Enrollments

As reported in Chapter I (Tables I-1 and I-2), the distribution of districts and schools by size closely matches the intended sample (Table C-4). The overall mean student enrollment in sample districts is 2,935; the median is 1,021.

This difference between mean and median reflects the fact that the sample includes some very large districts (e.g., New York City, Los Angeles, Dade County), which tends to inflate the mean. The mean enrollment does not differ among the three poverty levels.

The school enrollment of the sample schools was used to create three size categories for school survey analyses. These categories divided the schools approximately into thirds:

- Small schools (1-300 students), mean of 195 students; 32% of schools in sample.
- Medium-size schools (301-500), mean of 400 students; 34% of schools.
- Large schools (>500), mean of 703 students; 34% of schools.

The mean school enrollment, based on returned surveys, is 433, with a median of 400. The relative similarity of mean and median school enrollments stems from schools having a smaller range of enrollments than districts. School enrollment increases with district size: The mean enrollment of schools in small districts is 250, in medium districts 385, and in large districts 513. This relationship between district and school size is complicated somewhat by a significant interaction of district size and poverty. Schools in high-poverty small districts have lower enrollments (mean of 194) than those in moderate- (263) or low-poverty (264) small districts. Schools in moderate-poverty medium-size districts are smaller (355) than those in low-poverty (401) or high-poverty (425) medium-size districts.

Poverty Levels

Tables I-1 and I-2 also show district and school poverty levels in the actual sample. For districts overall, the mean percentage eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch is 31%. District size and poverty level interact, however: For the high-poverty districts, small districts have lower poverty levels (mean of 44% eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch) than medium (61%) or large (57%) districts (see Figure C-1).

The school survey also asked for free- or reduced-price lunch data. Overall, 34% of the students in surveyed schools meet this poverty criterion. Figure C-2 shows the dramatic difference among the schools in our sample on student eligibility for free- or reduced-price lunch. The high-poverty schools have substantially higher percentages of children from low-income families.

Figure C-1: Percentage of Students Eligible for Free- or Reduced-Price Lunch by District Size and Poverty Level

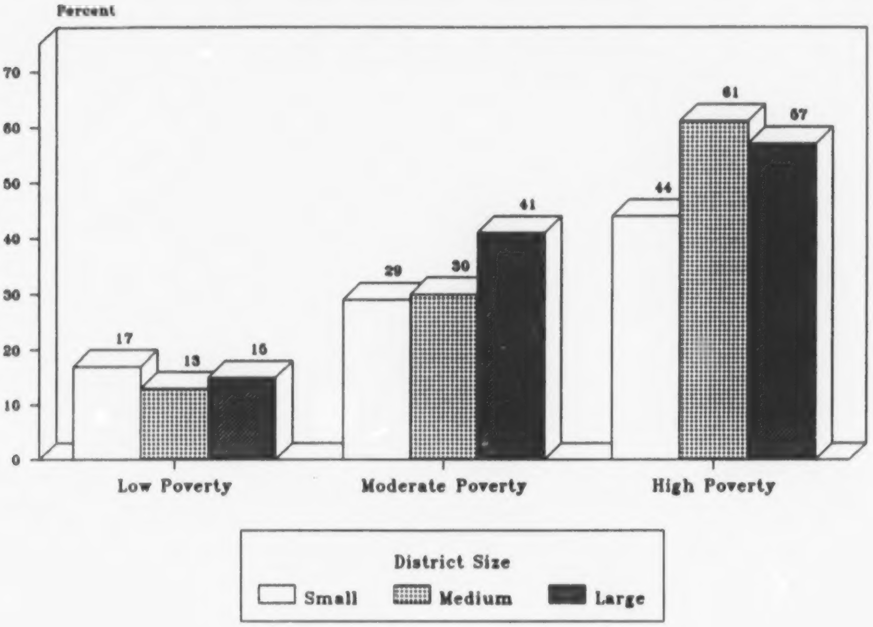
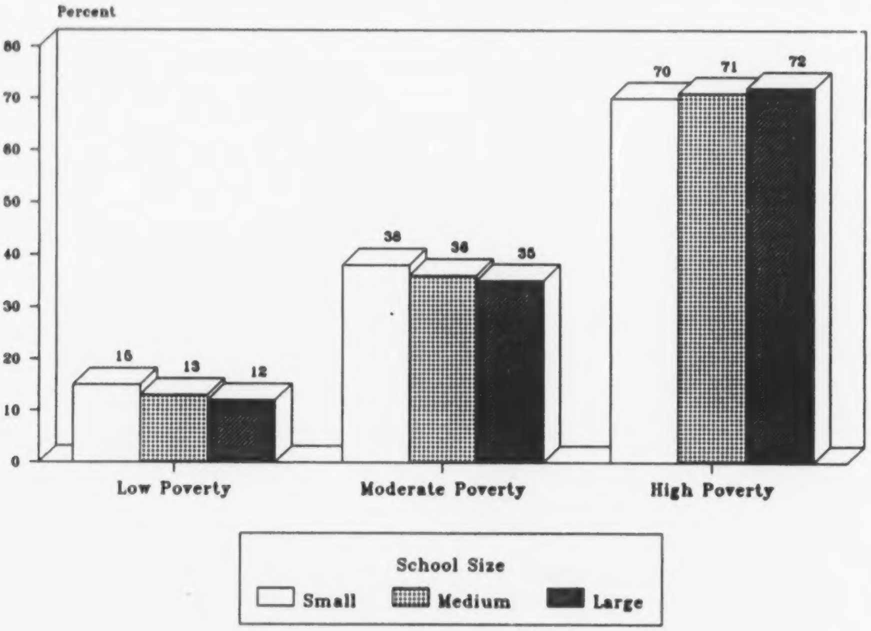


Figure C-2: Percentage of Students Eligible for Free- or Reduced-Price Lunch by School Size and Poverty Level



In analyzing school surveys, we used the reported percentage of students eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch as the indicator of school poverty. Schools were divided into three categories:

- Low-poverty schools (those with 25% or fewer eligible)
- Moderate-poverty schools (26-50% eligible)
- High-poverty schools (greater than 50% eligible)

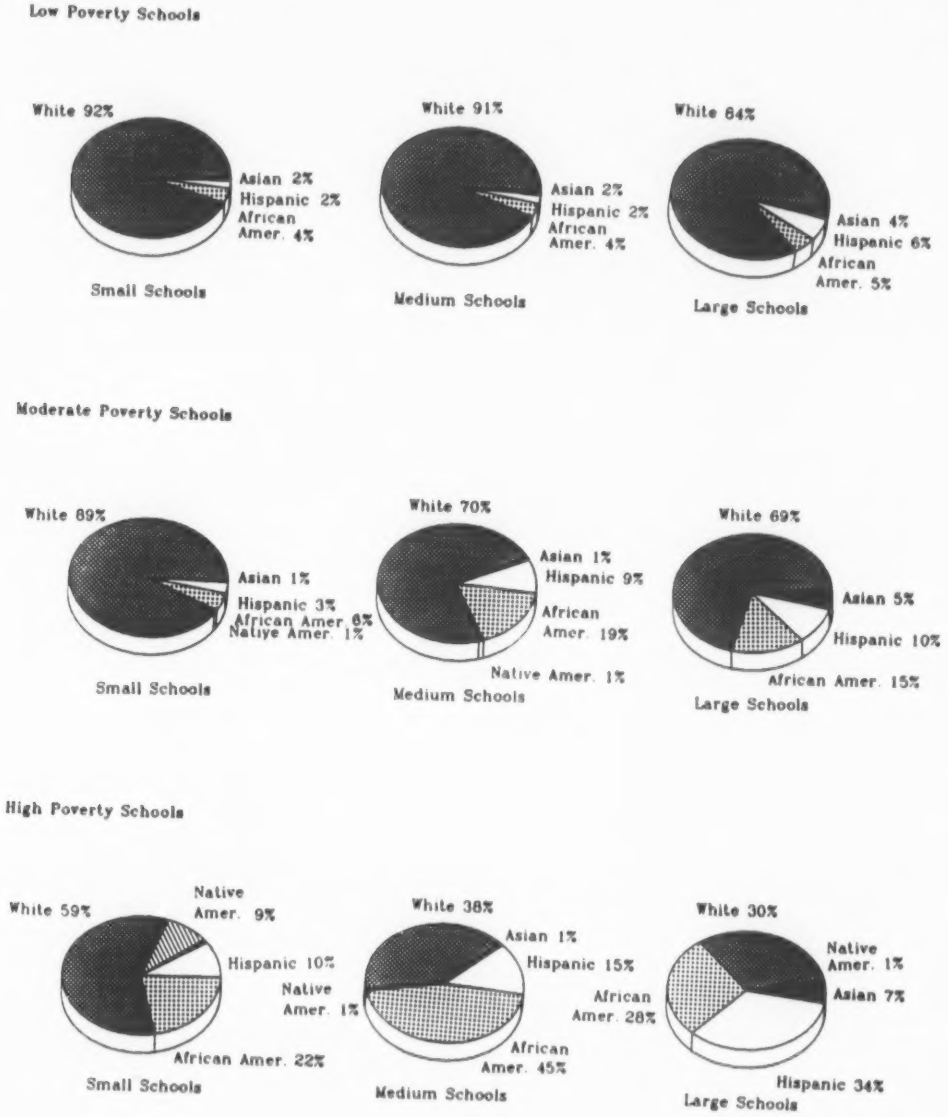
The low-poverty schools make up 37% of the responding schools, with an average eligibility rate of 13%; the moderate-poverty schools are 32% of respondents, with 37% eligible; the high-poverty schools are 31% of respondents, with 71% of their students eligible for free or reduced price lunch (see Table I-2 in Chapter I).

These school size and poverty groupings split the responding schools into nine roughly equal groups (see Table I-3). These school poverty and size groupings serve as the principal independent variables in categorical analyses of the school survey responses, with the actual school enrollment and percentage of students eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch being used in selected analyses (e.g., multiple regression).

Racial/Ethnic Composition

The racial/ethnic distribution is shown in Table I-4 of Chapter I. The proportion of students by racial/ethnic group varies directly with size and poverty level. In general, the larger the district or school and the higher the poverty level, the higher the proportions of minority students. Figure C-3 shows the distributions by school size and school poverty level for the school sample. Going down the page, poverty level increases, and the percentages of minority-group students increase; similarly, going from left to right within each poverty level, school size increases and the percentage of students who are minority increases. The distribution based on district-level data is similar to this.

Figure C-3: ***Percentage of Students in Each Racial/Ethnic Group in School Sample by School Size and Poverty Level***



English Proficiency

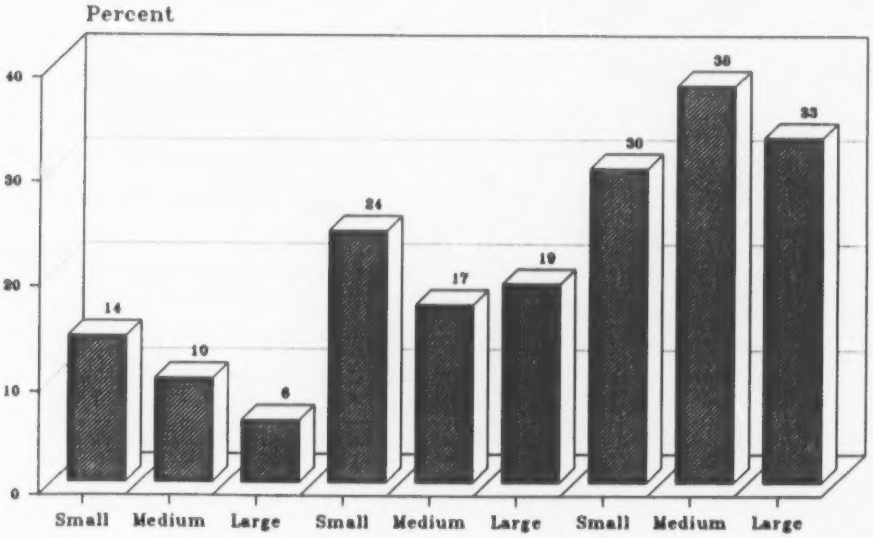
Students who are considered non-English-proficient or limited-English-proficient make up 4% of the enrollment in districts generally. These students are more likely to be found in high-poverty districts (6% of the enrollment) than in moderate-poverty (3%) or low-poverty (1%) districts. In the schools, LEP/NEP students make up 5% of the enrollment. This percentage is a joint function of school poverty and size, with the rate higher in larger and poorer schools. In large, high-poverty schools the rate is 18%, while in small, moderate-poverty schools it is less than 1%.

Chapter 1 Eligibility

Because Chapter 1 is the major federal program of compensatory education, and because Chapter 1 services may affect continuity of experience for children, we asked respondents how many students are eligible for, and receiving, Chapter 1 services. In districts, the percentage of students eligible for Chapter 1 averages 19%, but there are significant differences in this rate among the nine size/poverty groups, ranging from 37% eligible in medium-size, high-poverty districts to only 10% in the large, low-poverty districts.

In our school sample overall, 18% of children are eligible for Chapter 1 and 16% are receiving Chapter 1 services. Figure C-4 illustrates the effect of school size and poverty rates on eligibility and receipt-of-service rates. High-poverty schools tend to have higher eligibility rates than moderate-poverty or low-poverty schools, but within the high-poverty schools the small districts have a lower eligibility rate than the medium or large districts.

Figure C-4: Percentage of Students in Schools Eligible For Chapter 1 Services by School Size and Poverty Level



The pattern of students actually receiving Chapter 1 services is similar, in that high-poverty schools have a higher rate than the moderate- or low-poverty schools, and that there are significant differences among the nine size/poverty groups.

According to school survey responses, over 79% of students who are eligible for Chapter 1 services receive them. High-poverty schools and larger schools have higher rates of eligible students receiving services. The percentage of students receiving services ranges from 95% in large, high-poverty schools to 67% in small, low-poverty schools.

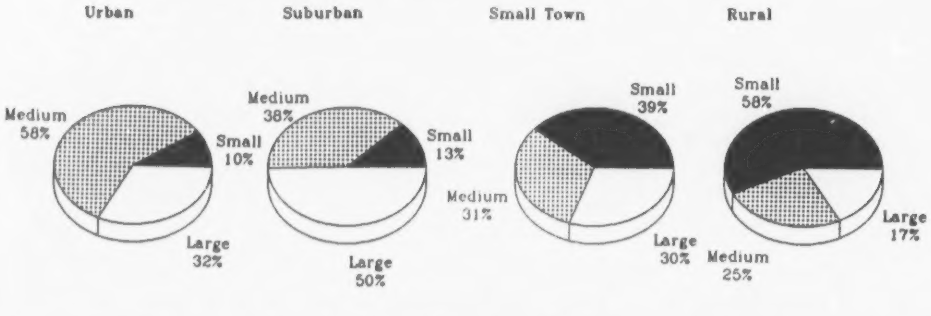
Urban/Rural Settings

We asked respondents to the school survey to describe the setting of the school, i.e., whether the majority of their students live in an area that could be described as (a) urban/central city, (b) urban fringe/suburban, (c) small town or community, or (d) rural (a variable sometimes identified as "urbanicity"). We found that one-third (33%) of the schools are in a small town/community, 27% in urban fringe/suburban areas, 25% in rural settings, and 15% in urban/central city areas.

School size is clearly related to setting: Small schools are more likely to be found in rural (44%) or small town (40%) settings, while large schools are more likely to be on the urban fringe (41%); medium schools are more equally divided among small town (29%), urban fringe (29%), and urban central city (25%).

It is also interesting to look at this distribution from the perspective of the setting instead of from the perspective of school size. Figure C-5 shows the school size breakdown within each of the four settings: As settings become more rural, the percentage of small schools increases.

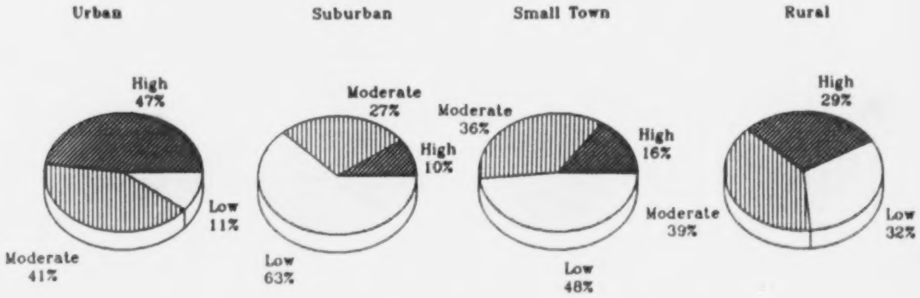
Figure C-5: ***Sizes of Schools in Urban/Central City, Urban Fringe/Suburban, Small Town, and Rural Areas***



Poverty level is also a clear function of setting. Low-poverty schools are most prevalent in urban fringe (40%) and small town (37%) areas; moderate-poverty schools are fairly evenly split, with slightly more (33%) in small towns; high-poverty schools are split primarily between urban center (32%) and rural (32%) areas.

From the perspective of the setting, Figure C-6 displays the percentage of schools of each poverty level in each of the four areas. The more urban the setting, the higher the poverty level.

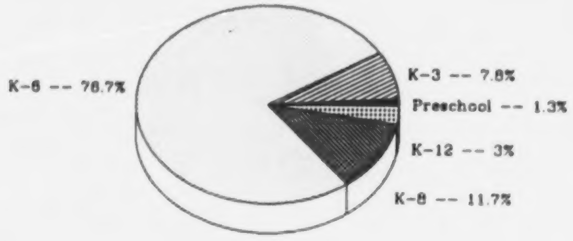
Figure C-6: ***Poverty Levels of Schools in Urban/Central City, Urban Fringe/Suburban, Small Town, and Rural Areas***



Grade Level Configurations

Schools were identified by the grade level configuration they have, according to the QED database. By far the most prevalent is the K-6 configuration, shown in Figure C-7 along with the others.

Figure C-7: ***Percentage of Schools With Each Grade Level Configuration***



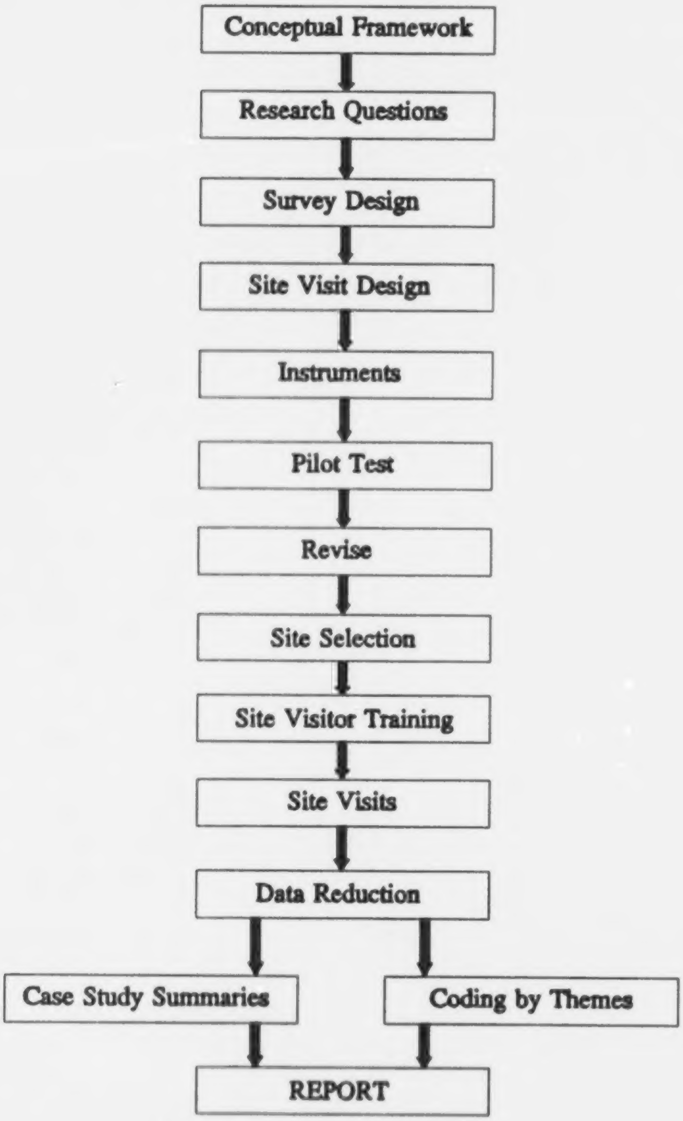
Although K-6 is the most common configuration overall, grade level configuration varies across school size and poverty categories. Among the large, moderate-poverty schools, for example, this configuration describes 94% of the schools; in contrast, it describes just 50% of the small, high-poverty schools. In addition to a higher than average percentage of K-8 schools (25%), the small, high-poverty schools have by far the highest percentage of K-12 schools (14%; the next highest percentage is 5%).

Site Visit Methodology

Introduction

Eight site visits were conducted in the spring of 1990 for the purpose of providing an indepth look at how different schools approach the issue of continuity and transition for children, families, and teachers. This section of the appendix describes the planning for the site visits component of the study, how we planned and selected sites, how we collected and analyzed data, how we prepared and revised site summary reports, and how we conducted cross-site analysis and developed vignettes for this report. Figure C-8 illustrates the steps in this process.

Figure C-8: Steps in Planning and Conducting Indepth Site Visits


Conceptual Framework
Research Questions
Survey Design
Site Visit Design
Instruments
Pilot Test
Revise
Site Selection
Site Visitor Training
Site Visits
Data Reduction
Case Study Summaries
Coding by Themes
REPORT

Conceptual framework

Because there has been so little research on the transition between preschool and kindergarten, we developed a conceptual framework by listing dimensions we thought would affect transition. The dimensions were drawn from a number of different areas: (a) research on effective preschool programs, (b) research on effective elementary school programs, (c) evidence about the elements of quality programs at both the elementary and preschool levels, and (d) experience from the few existing systematic efforts to create and study preschool-kindergarten transition (see research review in Appendix A).

Research Questions

A major purpose of this study is to learn what transition practices are occurring in the nation's districts and schools. The research questions, then, are primarily descriptive in nature.

- What are the characteristics of kindergarten programs?
- What are the characteristics of prekindergarten programs?
- To what degree are children perceived to have difficulty in the transition to kindergarten?
- What is the context of the kindergarten program and of transition activities?
- To what degree does the district or school have an organized approach for providing transition activities?
- What are the major influences on school transition activities?

Although the district and school surveys provide the most comprehensive descriptions in response to these questions, we wanted to provide more indepth information on the same topics in the site visits. Beyond that, we expected the site visits to tell us more about the major influences on transition and continuity.

Site Visit Design

The site visit instruments were developed in order to provide indepth descriptions of practices and programs of a select number of schools. Individual interview protocols were developed for district administrators, principals, kindergarten teachers, transition class teachers, and readiness class teachers. Focus group interview protocols were developed for preschool parents, kindergarten parents, preschool teachers, and preschool directors. An observation instrument (The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale or ECERS), allowing site visitors to systematically describe the preschool and kindergarten classroom environments, was selected as part of the site visit instrumentation. Instruments were reviewed by early childhood experts and practitioners, pilot tested at four sites, and revised prior to use.

Site Selection

Data analysis of survey data was occurring during the time sites were selected, and preliminary analyses of the surveys were used to select sites. In addition, responses to a district survey item asking for nominations were reviewed, as were suggestions from members of the study's advisory panel and other experts in the field. The recommended sites that were not part of the original survey were administered the surveys by phone in order to make the selection using comparable data.

We reviewed these data and nominations in an effort to identify eight schools with substantial transition activity taking place in schools serving at least 40% disadvantaged children in diverse circumstances. Even though more than 60 potential sites were thus identified, we found none that could be thought of as having a comprehensive, articulated transition "program." Instead, we identified eight schools exhibiting a variety of types of transition activities and strategies. These schools were selected to provide diversity along eight dimensions:

- schools in all types of settings, from small towns and rural areas to large inner-city areas;
- schools with at least 40% of their students eligible for free or reduced price lunch (five are above 75%);
- student bodies with diverse racial/ethnic characteristics;
- some with half-day kindergarten, some with full-day, and one with full-day every-other-day;
- one with a transition class, one with a readiness class;
- varying practices regarding retaining children in kindergarten;
- schools with a variety of types of preschool programs; and
- some with preschools in the school, others without.

Table C-7 shows the variation among the sites on these selection variables and summarizes selected descriptive information. A complete summary of the school and of the transition activities of each site is presented in Appendix B; a brief synopsis of each can be found at the end of Chapter I.

Site Visitor Training

Site visitors spent two days of training, including onsite observation of preschool and kindergarten classrooms using the ECERS. Site visitors, working in teams, arranged the itinerary for their site visit with school principals or district administrators prior to the visit. Schedules were established for interviewing school-based stakeholders. Names of contact persons at community feeder preschools were solicited from the principal or district administrator. Preschool visits and focus groups at the community sites were prearranged by the site visitors except in cases where the inhouse preschool was the only major feeder preschool for the kindergarten.

Site Visits

Teams spent from 4 to 5 days at each site conducting interviews, focus groups, and observations. In all except one visit, teams consisted of two visitors. In the remaining site, where many of the families were Spanish-speaking, the core team was assisted by another trained staff member who is bilingual and by the project officer for the study.

Data Reduction

Following the site visits, teams collaborated on a site visit summary following a predetermined outline. Each visitor also independently completed a site visitor rating scale as a measure of their perceptions of global continuity across stakeholders. Scores from the observation instrument were summarized and entered into the computer. All interviews and focus groups were read by two members of the research team and a list of general themes was

Table C-7: Transition Study Site Visit Schools

Site	Source[1]	Area	District Enrollment	School Enrollment	% Free Reduced Lunch	% Racial/Ethnic Distribution			Kindergarten Enrollment		
						White	African American	Hispanic	Full Day	1/2 Day	Other K
Pioneer Primary	S,R	Small Town	3,729	793	76.8%	24.3	75.7	0.0	0	160	0
Plainville	S	Rural	795	361	50.1%	99.4	0.6	0.0	0	0	64 full day every other
Hillside Elementary	S,R	Small Town	3,872	737	94%	7.5	1.5	91.0	0	130	0
Bear Valley	R	Urban Fringe	15,707	236	74.2%	78.4	5.9	8.5	15	30	0
Seaview Magnet	R	Urban	85,108	399	81.1%	26.7	70.6	2.8	50	0	0
Lakeside	O	Urban Fringe	402	345	40%	57.1	41.0	0.0	0	50	0
Southside	R	Urban	31,569	250	75%	24.0	68.0	8.0	75	0	0
Westside	O	Urban	34,357	1,300	85%	5.0	25.0	70.0	287	0	0

Site	Transition Classes?	Readiness Classes?	% Retained in K	% With Pre-K Experience	Pre-K Enrollment at School			
					# Students Head Start	# Students Chapter 1	# Students State/Local	# Students Daycare
Pioneer Primary	Yes	No	0%	66%	0	0	80	0
Plainville	No	No	5%	50%	0	0	40	0
Hillside Elementary	No	Yes	0%	60%	30	31	0	0
Bear Valley	Informal	No	.02%	45%	0	0	None in School	0
Seaview Magnet	No	No	2%	97%	0	39	0	10 Parent Co-Op
Lakeside	No	No	0%	50%	0	0	12	0
Southside	No	No	14%	70%	0	0	36	0
Westside	No	No	3%	50%	0	0	None in School	0

[1] S = Survey data R = Recommended on district survey O = Other recommendation

established for coding purposes. Interviews were then coded according to major themes and entered into a computer software package that allowed us to sort by site, by respondent, by question, and by theme. Cross-site analyses were conducted by forming matrices for specific questions addressing issues of continuity and transition activities observed in the different sites.

Report

Site visit summaries written by the site visitors were reviewed by the key personnel at the sites. They are included in Appendix B. Data from the thematic analyses were organized into matrices and were used to write the specific vignettes found in Chapters II and III of the report and to describe influences on transition activities, the focus of Chapter IV.

Endnote -- Appendix C

1. Our appreciation is extended to Michael Battaglia of Abt Associates for carrying out the weighting procedures and drafting this section of the report.

APPENDIX D

Weighted Tabulations of District Survey Responses

OMB No. 1885 - 0514
Expiration Date: 06/90

DISTRICT SURVEY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Please verify that the information on the mailing label is accurate. If any items are not correct, please cross them out and insert the correct information below. If the label is correct, you do not need to repeat this information.

☐ **Check here if label is accurate.**

Superintendent's name: ______________________

District Name: ______________________

Address: ______________________

____
City State Zip

This survey seeks information about all programs that serve kindergarten and/or prekindergarten children in your district. We are interested both in programs that are funded and/or administered by the public schools and those that are related because the program uses school space, receives in-kind services from the school district, or is otherwise formally affiliated with the public schools.

Kindergarten refers to educational programs primarily for five-year-olds. Prekindergarten (Pre-K or preschool) refers to any programs for children in the year preceding the kindergarten entry age in your district. Such programs may include Head Start, day care, private nursery school, and so forth.

[ ] Check here if your district has no programs for kindergarten-age children. If you check this box, please provide the correct mailing information requested above and return the survey to us. You do not need to complete this survey.

16 of 846 (1.9%) responding districts checked the box. The rest of this survey pertains to the remaining 830 responding districts.

Note: M = mean (weighted for sampling)
n = number of responding districts
wn = weighted count of districts

Except as indicated, figures indicate the weighted percentage of districts giving each response.

PART A: DISTRICT AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT INFORMATION

1. **What is the current total student enrollment in your district?** M = 2935.2 Students

(n = 830; wn = 13,288)

2. **How many students currently enrolled in this district belong to each of the following racial/ethnic groups?** (Total should equal total enrollment reported in Question 1.)

.01 Number of American Indian or Native Alaskan students

.03 Number of Asian or Pacific Islander students

.18 Number of Black, not Hispanic, students

.10 Number of Hispanic students

.68 Number of White, not Hispanic, students

(n = 826; wn = 13,253; average percentage of total enrollment)

3. **How many of the students currently enrolled in this district are eligible to receive free or reduced price lunches?**

.31 Number of free/reduced price lunch students

(n = 821; wn = 13,104; average percentage of total enrollment)

4. **How many of the students currently enrolled in this district are considered limited-English-proficient (LEP) or non-English proficient (NEP), i.e., students whose primary language is not English?.**

.04 Number of LEP/NEP students

(n = 827; wn = 13,257; average percentage of total enrollment)

5. **How many of the students currently enrolled in this district are:**

a. Eligible to receive Chapter 1 services?

.19 Students **(n = 779; wn = 12,595; average percentage of total enrollment)**

b. Currently receiving Chapter 1 services?

.12 Students **(n = 825; wn = 13,251; average percentage of total enrollment)**

PART B: DISTRICT KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

1. **How many students are currently enrolled in each of the following types of kindergarten programs?** Total should equal the total kindergarten enrollment of the district.

M = 217.0 Number in full-day kindergarten (at least 4 hrs./day), 5 days/week. **(n = 414; wn = 5376)**

M = 259.8 Number in half-day kindergarten (less than 4 hrs./day), 5 days/week. **(n = 445; wn = 7622)**

M = 67.3 Number in Other (Specify): **(n = 130; wn = 2167)**

2. **What are the district-wide eligibility criteria (in addition to age) for children's entry into kindergarten?** Check all that apply.

.00 Family income

.22 Results of screening or readiness testing

.07 Handicapping condition or special education needs

.05 Physical/health status

.01 Limited-English proficiency

.07 Other (Please specify):

.82 All children who meet the age cut-off are eligible; there are no other restrictions.

(n = 830; wn = 13,288)

3. **Check all activities sponsored by this district to involve parents of kindergarten students in their children's education.** Check all that apply.

.38 Parent education workshops and courses

.18 Parent education that includes home visits

.54 At-home learning activities to support school objectives

.37 Other (Specify): ____________________

(n = 830; wn = 13,288)

4. **Check all areas for which there is a district policy allowing parents of kindergarten students to have direct participation.** Check all that apply.

.05 Teacher evaluation policies

.34 Parent involvement policies

.10 Choosing the school their child will attend

.09 Selecting their child's teacher

.19 Developing parent grievance procedures/policies

.03 Hiring staff

.01 Evaluating individual teachers

.13 Budget policy and decisions

.39 Setting district goals

.42 Long-range school district planning

.26 District policy-making committees

.21 Policies on retaining kindergarten children

(n = 830; wn = 13,288)

5. Does your district have any parent education, parent training, or other program designed to promote parents' role as educators of their children?

.52 No

.48 Yes----> Please list or briefly describe the program(s):

(n = 830; wn = 13,288)

6. **Are there any pre-first grade transition classes* in this district?**

.78 No (Go to Part C, page 6.)

.22 Yes

(n = 830; wn = 13,288)

7. **How are children selected for transition classes in this district?** Check all that apply.

*	**	
.78	-	There are no transition classes (Go to Part C, page 6)
.21	.92	Recommendation of kindergarten teacher
.07	.30	Recommendation of first grade teacher
.08	.35	Recommendation of school counselor
.19	.87	Scores on readiness/screening test(s)
.02	.10	External agency recommendation
.14	.62	Parent request
.19	.84	Mutual parent and teacher decision
.03	.13	Selection criteria are decided by the individual schools (i.e., there are no district criteria)
.02	.09	Other (Specify):

(* n = 830, wn = 13,288; ** n = 244, wn = 2966 - excludes those responding "no transition classes")

8. **What percentage of last year's (1988-89) kindergarten children are currently enrolled in transition classes in this district?**

M = .10 Percent of schools with transition classes **(n = 244; wn = 2994)**

.04 Percent of all schools

---

*Transition classes are defined as classes for children who are old enough for first grade, but who are not considered developmentally or academically ready to be placed in first grade. In some districts they are referred to as readiness, developmental kindergarten, or pre-first grade classes.

PART C: CONTINUITY OF THE TRANSITION INTO KINDERGARTEN

Some children encounter problems in making the transition into kindergarten, while other children have minimal difficulty adjusting to the new kindergarten situation. Please indicate the **percentage** of entering kindergarten children in this district who experience the problems listed below.

	What percentage of incoming kindergarten children have difficulty . . .	0-9% 1	10-19% 2	20-49% 3	50-100% 4
1.	adjusting to kindergarten? **(M = 1.32; n = 812; wn = 13,197)**	.73	.23	.03	.01
2.	meeting the behavioral expectations of kindergarten? **(M = 1.42; n = 813; wn = 13,233)**	.65	.29	.05	.01
3.	meeting the academic demands of kindergarten? **(M = 1.60; n = 813; wn = 13,224)**	.54	.35	.10	.02
4.	getting used to the size of the kindergarten class? **(M = 1.23; n = 808; wn = 13,141)**	.83	.12	.04	.01
5.	adapting to kindergarten teaching styles? **(M = 1.27; n = 810; wn = 13,180)**	.78	.17	.03	.01
6.	adjusting to the length of the school day? **(M = 1.34; n = 808; wn = 13,146)**	.75	.18	.06	.01
7.	coping with new school facilities? **(M = 1.18; n = 811; wn = 13,211)**	.87	.10	.03	.01
8.	accepting the school's rules and discipline? **(M = 1.33; n = 811; wn = 13,191)**	.73	.22	.04	.01
9.	adjusting to school transportation? **(M = 1.24; n = 786; wn = 12,761)**	.80	.17	.02	.01
10.	adjusting to a new group of peers? **(M = 1.25; n = 807; wn = 13,120)**	.79	.18	.02	.01
11.	interacting appropriately with other children? **(M = 1.37; n = 809; wn = 13,167)**	.67	.29	.03	.01

The next questions are about school activities designed to ease children's transition experience as they enter public school kindergarten. This can be accomplished in different ways in different schools, but the specific activities are designed to ensure greater continuity as children make the transition from preschool, day care, and the home into kindergarten. Such activities are referred to as "continuity activities" in this survey.

Continuity activities may include communication between kindergarten and preschool teachers, visits by preschoolers and their parents to their future kindergarten class, involvement by both preschool and kindergarten staff in planning a coordinated curriculum, and so forth.
Please answer the following questions about continuity activities in this district.

[ ] **If there are no continuity activities in this district, check this box and skip to Question 18, page 8.**
.31 checked the box (n = 830, wn = 13,288)

12. **What is the extent of continuity activities in this district?** Check the one that comes closest to describing the situation in this district.

.33 There are a few continuity activities occurring at one or two elementary schools.

.46 There are a few continuity activities at most of the elementary schools.

.04 There is a wide range of continuity activities at a few elementary schools.

.17 There is a wide range of continuity activities at most of the elementary schools.

(n = 609; wn = 9099; excludes those checking box above)

13. **Does this district have a formal policy for involving the staff of prekindergarten programs in district continuity activities?**

.86 No

.15 Yes

(n = 612; wn = 9168)

14. **Check the one group that has primary responsibility for initiating continuity activities.** Check only one.

.13 District administrators

.33 School building administrators

.08 Preschool programs, e.g., Head Start or day care center

.25 District kindergarten teachers in their local schools

.01 Parents

.04 Other (please specify): ______

.16 CHECKED MORE THAN ONE

(n = 613; wn = 9145)

15. **Is there a district-level staff person who is responsible for coordinating continuity activities?**

.64 No

.36 Yes----> Please give title/position: ____________________

(n = 612; wn = 9143)

16. **Are continuity activities targeted toward any particular group of children?** Check all that apply.

*	**	
.13	.42	Children from low-income families
.05	.17	Children from racial/ethnic minorities
.27	.88	Special needs/handicapped children
.08	.24	Children with limited-English proficiency (LEP)
.08	.25	Children with no prekindergarten experience
.06	.19	Other (Please explain): ____________________
.69	-	Continuity activities are not aimed at any particular group or groups

(* n = 613, wn = 9172; ** n = 217, wn = 2824 - excludes those responding "not aimed")

17. **Have there been any district-wide evaluations of any aspects of continuity activities?**

.84 No

.16 Yes

(n = 613; wn = 9172)

18. **Are there any planned activities occurring in schools in this district designed to help children with transitions through the grades beyond kindergarten?**

.43 No (Skip to Question 20, page 10.)

.57 Yes

(n = 830; wn = 13,288)

19. To what extent do the following types of articulation occur beyond kindergarten?

	In None or Few Schools 1	In Some Schools 2	In Most Or All Schools 3	Don't Know -
Information about student's social, academic emotional, or physical status is documented and passed on to each child's next teacher. (M = 2.95; n = 596; wn = 8638)	.01	.02	.95	.02
There is coordination of curricula, materials, or instructional strategies across the early elementary grades. (M = 2.96; n = 596; wn = 8657)	.01	.02	.96	.01
Joint problem solving about students experiencing difficulty in adjustment is carried out using established guidelines. (M = 2.75; n = 594; wn = 8602)	.08	.09	.80	.03
Teachers and administrators collaborate to create a formal plan for achieving across-grade educational goals for children. (M = 2.65; n = 596; wn = 8653)	.12	.09	.75	.04
Early elementary grades are treated as a unified instructional block. (M = 2.14; n = 587; wn = 8485)	.37	.07	.50	.05

20. Please tell us about elementary schools in which there are exceptionally effective programs for helping children make a smooth transition from preschool to kindergarten. If there are one or two schools in this district that have a meaningful program of activities aimed at reducing the discontinuities between children's preschool and kindergarten experiences, please provide information on them below. Very briefly explain your reason for recommending the school's program as being particularly effective.

School: ______________________________

Address: ______________________________

____

Principal: ______________________________

Telephone: ______________________________

Reason for recommending: ______________________________

____

____

Estimated percentage of students in the school eligible for free or reduced price lunches: _____%

School: ______________________________

Address: ______________________________

____

Principal: ______________________________

Telephone: ______________________________

Reason for recommending: ______________________________

____

____

Estimated percentage of students in the school eligible for free or reduced price lunches: _____%

.21 recommended at least 1 school (n = 830; wn = 13,288)

[in unweighted numbers, 172 districts --17%--recommended at least one school]

PART D: DISTRICT PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

[ ] **The remainder of this survey asks about prekindergarten programs in this district. If there are no prekindergarten classes in this district, check this box and skip to Question 5, page 12.**

.41 checked the box (n = 830, wn = 13,288)

1. **Check all types of prekindergarten programs there are in this district for four-year-olds:**

.34 State or local prekindergarten program administered by the school district.

.04 Head Start administered by the school district.

.39 Head Start administered by an outside agency.

.05 Day care program administered by the school district.

.28 Day care program administered by an outside agency.

.10 Chapter 1 prekindergarten.

.59 Special education.

.14 Other prekindergarten program administered by an outside agency.

.15 Other (Describe):

(n = 576; wn = 7818; excludes those checking box above)

2. **For how many years has a prekindergarten program been continuously offered in this district?**

M = 8.3 Years **(n = 484; wn = 6587)**

3. **Does this district have transition or readiness class(es) for children who are old enough for kindergarten but who are not considered developmentally or academically ready for kindergarten?**

(n = 662; wn = 9813)

.76 No ----> Go to Question 5.

.24 Yes ----> **4. If this district has such a readiness class or classes, what are the district-wide eligibility criteria for selecting children?** Check all that apply.

.39 Recommendation of prekindergarten teacher

.49 Recommendation of kindergarten teacher

.20 Recommendation of school counselor

.43 Recommendation of elementary school principal

.62 Parent and teacher joint recommendation

.81 Scores on readiness/screening test(s)

.30 External agency recommendation

.50 Parent request

.19 Other (Specify): ____________________

(n = 154; wn = 2348)

5. **Please indicate the name, title, and telephone number of the person completing this form. This information is needed so that we know whom to contact if we have any questions.**

Name (please print): ____________________

Title: ____________________

Telephone: (   ) ____________________

TITLE OF RESPONDENT

.41 Superintendent
.31 Other central administrator
.20 Elementary principal
.05 Other elementary staff
.01 Other

(n = 741; wn = 11,697)

2.5

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer these questions. If there is anything else you would like us to know about your early childhood program, especially relating to continuity and transition, please use this space to tell us:

The U.S. Education Department is interested in compiling information on preschool-to-kindergarten transition activities. If you have any documents, plans, brochures, etc., that describe your district transition activities, please send them under separate cover to RMC Research Corporation at the address below. We are also interested in any evaluation reports describing district evaluations of transition or continuity activities. Please do not include your materials with the survey.

THIS IS THE END OF THE SURVEY. THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION. PLEASE RETURN THE COMPLETED SURVEY IN THE PRE-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE TO:

RMC RESEARCH CORPORATION
TRANSITION STUDY COORDINATOR
400 LAFAYETTE ROAD
HAMPTON, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03842

APPENDIX E

Weighted Tabulations of School Survey Responses

OMB No. 1875 - 0038
Expiration Date: 06/30/90

SCHOOL SURVEY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Please verify that the information on the mailing label is accurate. If any items are not correct, please cross them out and insert the correct information below. If the label is correct, you do not need to repeat this information.

☐ **Check here if label is accurate.**

Principal's name: ______________________

School Name: ______________________

Address: ______________________

City State Zip

This survey seeks information about all programs that serve kindergarten and/or prekindergarten children in your district. We are interested both in programs that are funded and/or administered by the public schools and those that are related because the program uses school space, receives in-kind services from the school district or is otherwise formally affiliated with the public schools.

Kindergarten refers to educational programs primarily for five-year-olds. Prekindergarten (Pre-K or preschool) refers to any programs for children in the year preceding the kindergarten entry age in your district. Such programs may include Head Start, day care, private nursery school and so forth.

[ ] Check here if your school has no programs for kindergarten-age children. If you check this box, please provide the correct mailing information requested above and return the survey to us. You do not need to complete this survey.

129 of 1298 responding schools checked the box. The rest of this survey pertains to the remaining 1169 responding schools.

Note:
M = mean (weighted for sampling)
n = number of responding schools
wn = weighted count of schools

Except as indicated, figures indicate weighted percentage of schools giving each response.

PART A: SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT INFORMATION

1. **What is the current total student enrollment in your school building?**

   M = 433.0 Students **(n = 1169; wn = 43,551)**

2. **How many of the students currently enrolled in this school belong to each of the following racial/ethnic groups?** (Total should equal the total enrollment reported in Question 1.)

   .01 Number of American Indian or Native Alaskan students

   .04 Number of Asian or Pacific Islander students

   .14 Number of Black, not Hispanic, students

   .11 Number of Hispanic students

   .71 Number of White, not Hispanic, students

   (n = 1164; wn = 43,440; average percentage of total enrollment)

3. **How many of the students currently enrolled in this school are eligible to receive free or reduced price lunches?**

   .34 Number of free/reduced price lunch-students

   (n = 1157; wn = 43,125; average percentage of total enrollment)

4. **How many of the students currently enrolled in this school are considered limited-English-proficient (LEP) or non-English proficient (NEP), i.e., students whose primary language is not English?**

   .05 Number of LEP/NEP students

   (n = 1161; wn = 43,325; average percentage of total enrollment)

5. **How many of the students currently enrolled in this school are:**

   a. Eligible to receive Chapter 1 services?

   .18 Students **(n = 1048; wn = 39,266; average percentage of total enrollment)**

   b. Currently receiving Chapter 1 services?

   .16 Students **(n = 1158; wn = 43,158; average percentage of total enrollment)**

6. **Which of the following best describes the area in which the majority of this school's students reside?** Check only one. **(n = 1167; wn = 43,531)**

   .15 Urban/central city

   .27 Urban fringe/suburban

   .33 Small town or community

   .25 Rural

PART B: SCHOOL KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

1. **Please provide the following information about the kindergarten program in this school:**

	Total Number of Teachers (FTEs)*	Total Number of Aides (FTEs)*	Total Number of Students Currently Enrolled
a. Full-Day Kindergarten (at least 4 hrs/day), 5 days/wk **(n = 501; wn = 16,150)**	3.1	1.4	69.1
b. Half-Day Kindergarten (less than 4 hrs/day), 5 days/wk **(n = 602; wn = 25,425)**	1.9	0.7	69.2
c. Other Arrangement (Specify: ____________ **(n = 124; wn = 4122)**	1.2	0.7	37.9

2. **What percentage of last year's (1988-89) kindergarten children were retained in kindergarten this year?**

M = .05 Percent in schools that retain children

.04 Percent in all schools **(n = 1161; wn = 43,286)**

3. **What percentage of last year's (1988-89) kindergarten children were placed in a transition** class this year?**

M = .13 Percent in schools with transition classes

.04 Percent in all schools **(n = 1146; wn = 42,423)**

---

* Under teachers and aides, give the total number of full-time equivalents (FTEs). For example, if you have one full-time teacher and one half-time teacher that would be 1.5 FTEs. 3 half-time aides would also be 1.5 FTEs.

** Transition classes are defined as classes for children who are old enough for first grade, but who are not considered developmentally or academically ready to be placed in first grade. In some districts they are referred to as readiness, developmental kindergarten, or pre-first grade classes.

4. **How are children selected for transition classes in this school?** Check all that apply.

*	**	
.76	-	There are no transition classes (If not, skip to Question 6 below.)
.22	.90	Recommendation of kindergarten teacher
.06	.23	Recommendation of first grade teacher
.05	.22	Recommendation of school counselor
.20	.82	Scores on readiness/screening test(s)
.01	.04	External agency recommendation
.11	.45	Parent request
.20	.80	Mutual parent and teacher decision
.04	.17	Other (Specify): ____________________

(* n = 1169, wn = 43,551; ** n = 292, wn = 10,627 - excludes those responding "no transition classes")

5. **What is the role of parental consent in the placement of children in transition classes?** Check one.

.67 Consent is required.

.27 Consent is sought, but not required.

.06 Consent is not part of the decision.

(n = 292; wn = 10,627)

6. **Approximately what percentage of this year's kindergarten children were enrolled in daycare, preschool, prekindergarten, and/or nursery school prior to kindergarten entry?**

M = .49 Percent **(n = 1013; wn = 37,441)**

7. **How are teachers in the kindergarten program selected?** Please choose the one response that most closely describes the general practice in this school.

.38 Hired at the district level

.37 Selected by principal

.12 Selected by principal in cooperation with kindergarten teachers or other staff

.00 Selected by kindergarten staff with approval of principal

.08 Other (Please explain): ____________________

.05 CHECKED MORE THAN ONE
(n = 1112; wn = 41,561)

8. **Below is a list of staff development and training opportunities sometimes provided by school systems. Check all the activities made available by this school or district in 1988-89 that at least half of the kindergarten teachers participated in.**

*	**	
.77	.80	Three or more inservice training days
.39	.40	Visits to, or observations of, other schools
.52	.54	Release time for attending early childhood professional conferences
.38	.39	Reimbursement for attending early childhood professional conferences
.34	.35	Enrollment in college or university courses
.09	.10	Other (Specify): ______
.04	-	None offered in 1988-89

(* n = 1169, wn = 43,551; ** n = 1132, wn = 41,755 - excludes those responding "none offered")

9. **Are kindergarten children routinely assessed with any standardized test, screening or readiness instrument?**
(n = 1169; wn = 43,551)

.18 No (Skip to Question 11.)

.82 Yes ——>10. **If Yes, for what purposes are these instruments administered?** Check all that apply.

.24 Making classroom assignments

.73 Teacher use in individualizing instruction

.47 Determining Chapter 1 eligibility

.38 Determining which children should be retained in kindergarten

.44 Determining special education referrals

.21 Placement in pre-first grade readiness or transition class

.16 Other: ______

(n = 973; wn = 35,628)

11. **Check all activities provided by this school to involve parents of kindergarten children in their children's education.** Check all that apply.

.37 Parent education workshops and courses

.55 At-home learning activities to support school objectives

.98 Letters, calendars, newsletters, etc., to provide parents with information about school

.78 Parent volunteers in the classroom

.99 Teacher-parent conferences

.12 Parent education that includes home visits

.51 School committees

.09 Other (Specify): ______________________

(n = 1169; wn = 43,551)

12. **Check all areas in which parents of kindergarten students directly participate in their school's operation and policies.** Check all that apply.

.02 Teacher evaluation policies

.32 Parent involvement policies

.15 Choosing the school their child will attend

.15 Selecting their child's teacher

.07 Developing parent grievance procedures/policies

.03 Hiring staff

.00 Evaluating individual teachers

.11 Budget policy and decisions

.39 Setting school goals

.35 Long-range school planning

.25 School policy-making committees

.08 Policies on retaining kindergarten children

(n = 1169; wn = 43,551)

13. **The following statements might be used to characterize particular kindergarten programs in varying degrees. Please rate the degree to which each statement characterizes the kindergarten programs in this school.**

	Not at all true for this school 1	2	Somewhat true for this school 3	4	Definitely true for this school 5
The focus of reading instruction is the basal reader with accompanying workbook and worksheets. **(M = 2.65; n = 1158; wn = 43,253)**	**.34**	**.13**	**.24**	**.13**	**.17**
Teachers provide opportunities for children to work together in small-group projects. **(M = 4.59; n = 1165; wn = 43,466)**	**.01**	**.02**	**.08**	**.19**	**.71**
Children are quiet during class time. **(M = 3.15; n = 1165; wn = 43,458)**	**.04**	**.15**	**.52**	**.23**	**.07**
The curriculum is divided into separate subjects with time allotted for each. **(M = 3.57; n = 1165; wn = 43,462)**	**.06**	**.13**	**.29**	**.20**	**.31**
A number of different learning centers or interest areas are located in each classroom. **(M = 4.38; n = 1165; wn = 43,471)**	**.01**	**.03**	**.13**	**.22**	**.61**
Classes are conducted primarily with children in large-group arrangements. **(M = 2.97; n = 1164; wn = 43,409)**	**.08**	**.23**	**.40**	**.21**	**.07**
Children are tested regularly in each subject. **(M = 2.60; n = 1166; wn = 43,481)**	.27	.21	.27	.14	.11
Grades are used as important motivators. **(M = 1.80; n = 1159; wn = 43,222)**	.52	.24	.18	.05	.02
The children's learning activities are primarily determined by the teacher. **(M = 3.84; n = 1162; wn = 43,090)**	.01	.06	.25	.43	.25
Time is set aside for children to engage in free play everyday. **(M = 4.62; n = 1166; wn = 43,481)**	.01	.02	.06	.19	.73
Children are encouraged to evaluate their own work. **(M = 3.56; n = 1165; wn = 43,466)**	.02	.08	.38	.35	.17
Daily worksheets are used to give children practice with the skills they are learning. **(M = 3.42; n = 1163; wn = 43,381)**	.07	.16	.29	.27	.22
Children have opportunities to dictate and/or write about their experiences several times a week. **(M = 3.68; n = 1165; wn = 43,403)**	.04	.11	.29	.28	.29

	Not at all true for this school 1	2	Somewhat true for this school 3	4	Definitely true for this school 5
All children are expected to achieve the same academic skills by the end of the kindergarten. **(M = 2.78; n = 1161; wn = 43,357)**	**.23**	**.21**	**.24**	**.21**	**.11**
Blocks and other manipulatives are used for math learning. **(M = 4.58; n = 1166; wn = 43,481)**	**.00**	**.01**	**.08**	**.21**	**.70**
All children are expected to know how to read by the end of kindergarten. **(M = 2.02; n = 1163; wn = 43,373)**	**.47**	**.21**	**.18**	**.10**	**.04**
Teachers involve children in establishing rules for social interactions in the classroom. **(M = 3.75; n = 1166; wn = 43,481)**	**.02**	**.10**	**.31**	**.27**	**.31**
Children play an important role in selecting their own learning activities. **(M = 3.09; n = 1164; wn = 43,352)**	**.03**	**.21**	**.47**	**.19**	**.09**
Time for both indoor and outdoor play is allowed every day (weather permitting). **(M = 4.42; n = 1165; wn = 43,436)**	**.04**	**.04**	**.07**	**.14**	**.70**
Creative activities using paper, paint, crayons, brushes, clay, paste and scissors are seen as an important part of the curriculum. **(M = 4.78; n = 1165; wn = 43,459)**	**.00**	**.00**	**.03**	**.15**	**.82**
Books are read to the children every day. **(M = 4.79; n = 1165; wn = 43,451)**	**.00**	**.01**	**.03**	**.13**	**.84**

14. How would you characterize the kindergarten program in this school? Check only one.

.17 Academic

.19 Traditional

.44 Developmental

.08 Progressive

.05 Other (please describe): ______________________

.07 CHECKED MORE THAN ONE

(n = 1167; wn = 43,501)

PART C: CONTINUITY OF THE TRANSITION INTO KINDERGARTEN

Some children encounter problems in making the transition into kindergarten, while other children have minimal difficulty adjusting to the new kindergarten situation. Please indicate the percentage of entering kindergarten children in this school who experience the problems listed below.

		0-9%	10-19%	20-49%	50-100%
	What percentage of incoming kindergarten children have difficulty . . .	1	2	3	4
1.	adjusting to kindergarten? **(M = 1.29; n = 1165; wn = 43,458)**	.77	.17	.05	.01
2.	meeting the behavioral expectations of kindergarten? **(M = 1.53; n = 1165; wn = 43,472)**	.60	.29	.10	.02
3.	meeting the academic demands of kindergarten? **(M = 1.75; n = 1166; wn = 43,482)**	.45	.37	.16	.02
4.	getting used to the size of the kindergarten class? **(M = 1.32; n = 1165; wn = 43,458)**	.77	.16	.05	.02
5.	adapting to kindergarten teaching styles? **(M = 1.29; n = 1165; wn = 43,458)**	.76	.19	.03	.01
6.	adjusting to the length of the school day? **(M = 1.48; n = 1164; wn = 43,442)**	.67	.21	.08	.03
7.	coping with new school facilities? **(M = 1.23; n = 1165; wn = 43,458)**	.80	.17	.02	.01
8.	accepting the school's rules and discipline? **(M = 1.41; n = 1165; wn = 43,458)**	.67	.26	.06	.01
9.	adjusting to school transportation? **(M = 1.26; n = 1126; wn = 41,580)**	.78	.18	.03	.01
10.	adjusting to a new group of peers? **(M = 1.29; n = 1162; wn = 43,246)**	.76	.20	.03	.01
11.	interacting appropriately with other children? **(M = 1.44; n = 1166; wn = 43,482)**	.64	.30	.06	.01

The next questions are about school activities that are designed to ensure continuity of children's experience as they enter public school kindergarten. Different activities may be appropriate in different schools, but all have the purpose of ensuring greater continuity as children make the transition from their preschool, day care, or home experience into kindergarten. Such activities are referred to as "continuity activities" in this survey.

Items 12 to 20 use a 5-point scale. Items are ranked according to increasing degrees of formality, frequency, intensity, and so forth. The statements under 1, 3, and 5 on the scale should help you decide the most appropriate response for an individual item. If one of these closely describes the situation in your school, circle that number. If the situation in your school seems to fall between 1 and 3, then circle 2; if it's between 3 and 5, circle 4. Please circle only one number per item and do not mark between the numbers.

12. **Transfer of records to kindergarten teachers:***

1	2	3	4	5
No teachers receive any information about any entering kindergarten students.		Some teachers receive some information about some entering kindergarten students.		All teachers receive extensive information about all entering kindergarten students.
.13	.11	.25	.23	.27

(M = 3.40; n = 1164; wn = 43,401)

13. **Communication between kindergarten teachers and previous caregivers/teachers about entering students:**

1	2	3	4	5
No communication occurs about any entering students.		Communication occurs only when children experience school adjustment problems.		There is systematic communication with all previous caregivers or teachers.
.18	.24	.28	.20	.10

(M = 2.80; n = 1161; wn = 43,318)

14. **Communication between kindergarten teachers and entering students' caregivers/teachers about curriculum issues:***

1	2	3	4	5
No kindergarten teachers communicate about curriculum issues.		Some kindergarten teachers have established communication with some of their entering students' caregivers/teachers about curriculum.		There is an organized school effort, involving all kindergarten teachers, to communicate with as many caregivers/teachers as possible about curriculum.
.30	.16	.24	.13	.17

(M = 2.71; n = 1162; wn = 43,349)

* If there is only one kindergarten teacher in the school, the rating will be either 1 or 5.

15. Development of a curriculum coordinated with children's prekindergarten programs:

1	2	3	4	5
The kindergarten curriculum has been developed independent of prekindergarten curricula.		Some features of the kindergarten curriculum are coordinated with prekindergarten curricula.		The kindergarten curriculum has been specifically designed to build on prekindergarten curricula.
.49	**.11**	**.21**	**.08**	**.12**

(M = 2.25; n = 1158; wn = 43,180)

16. School visits by entering kindergarten children and their parents:

1	2	3	4	5
No parents or children visit their new school prior to the beginning of the school year.		About half make visits to their new school prior to the beginning of the new school year.		All make visits to their new school prior to the beginning of the new school year.
.03	**.16**	**.17**	**.32**	**.32**

(M = 3.75; n = 1163; wn = 43,329)

17. Formality of arrangements for school visits by parents of entering kindergarten students:

1	2	3	4	5
The school does not make arrangements for any school visitations by parents.		The school allows visitations by parents on an informal basis.		The school has established a formal program for school visitations by parents.
.03	**.02**	**.28**	**.21**	**.47**

(M = 4.07; n = 1165; wn = 43,476)

18. Informing parents of entering kindergarten children of their rights and responsibilities in the public school system:

1	2	3	4	5
There is no written document or other procedure for informing parents of their rights and responsibilities.		There are some procedures (e.g., meetings) for informing new parents of their rights and responsibilities.		A written document is distributed to parents, there is a meeting explaining their rights, and parents are provided with a contact person for further information.
.05	**.03**	**.29**	**.25**	**.39**

(M = 3.89; n = 1163; wn = 43,450)

19. Parent involvement in classroom activities aimed at smoothing children's transition into public school*:

1	2	3	4	5
There is no organized effort to involve parents in such classroom activities.		Some kindergarten teachers encourage parents to participate in such classroom activities.		All kindergarten teachers, with administrator support, encourage parents to be involved in such classroom activities.
.13	.06	.18	.17	.47

(M = 3.78; n = 1162; wn = 43,448)

20. School policy on continuity activities:

1	2	3	4	5
The school provides no policy guidance for continuity activities.		The school has an informal policy that suggests continuity activities.		The school has a written policy that specifies continuity activities that must occur.
.23	.11	.39	.15	.13

(M = 2.83; n = 1162; wn = 43,375)

21. To what extent do the staff of preschool, Head Start, day care, or other prekindergarten programs that feed into this school participate in the following continuity activities? Circle one rating for each.

The participation of the staff from pre-K programs is approximately:

	0-25% 1	26-50% 2	51-75% 3	76-100% 4	Don't Know
Participating in joint workshops with school staff on curriculum, child development issues, etc. **(M = 1.39; n = 1148; wn = 42,971)**	.75	.04	.03	.08	.09
Sharing information about an individual child's developmental progress with school staff **(M = 1.67; n = 1149; wn = 42,992)**	.64	.12	.06	.13	.05
Providing assistance for children experiencing difficulty in school adjustment **(M = 1.56; n = 1147; wn = 42,935)**	.69	.08	.06	.10	.07
Talking with children and their parents to help prepare them for the transition to public school kindergarten **(M = 2.02; n = 1144; wn = 42,728)**	.44	.12	.09	.18	.18
Other (specify): **(M = 1.96; n = 83; wn = 2572)**	.43	.02	.02	.19	.34

*** If there is only one kindergarten teacher in the school, the rating will be either 1 or 5.**

22. **Check the one group that has primary responsibility for initiating continuity activities.** Check only one.

.18 District administrators

.24 School building administrators

.07 Preschool programs, e.g., Head Start or day care center

.36 Kindergarten teachers

.03 Parents

.07 Other (Please specify): ______________________________

.06 CHECKED MORE THAN ONE

(n = 1132; wn = 42,349)

23. **Is there someone at this school who is responsible for coordinating continuity activities?**

.64 No

.36 Yes----> Please give title/position: ______________________________

(n = 1155; wn = 43,252)

24. **Is there a district administrator who is responsible for coordinating continuity activities?**

.56 No

.36 Yes----> Please give title/position: ______________________________

.08 Don't Know

(n = 1156; wn = 43,265)

25. **Are continuity activities targeted toward any particular group of children?** Check all that apply.

*	**	
.60	-	Continuity activities are not aimed at any particular group or groups
.14	.34	Children from low-income families
.08	.21	Children from racial/ethnic minorities
.26	.66	Special needs/handicapped children
.13	.32	Children with limited-English proficiency (LEP)
.07	.17	Children with no prekindergarten experience
.05	.14	Other (Please explain): ______________________________

(* n = 1161, wn = 43,417; ** n = 458, wn = 17,433 - excludes those responding "not aimed")

26. **Please estimate the percentage of the parents of incoming kindergarten children who are involved in each of the following continuity activities.** Circle one response for each item:

	0-25% 1	26-50% 2	51-75% 3	76-100% 4	Don't Know
Conducting at-home activities to prepare their child for school (e.g., reading books from a school reading list, talking to their children about what to expect in kindergarten). **(M = 2.44; n = 1156; wn = 43,253)**	.23	.24	.26	.19	.08
Providing the kindergarten teacher with information or materials that may help their child adjust to kindergarten (e.g., family photograph, favorite toy, child's nickname). **(M = 2.45; n = 1154; wn = 43,026)**	.32	.18	.17	.29	.04
Attending orientation visits to kindergarten class before school starts. **(M = 3.02; n = 1150; wn = 43,072)**	.19	.12	.17	.51	.02
Attending teacher-parent conferences before school starts. **(M = 2.17; n = 1150; wn = 42,872)**	.50	.08	.11	.27	.04
Other (specify): **(M = 3.49; n = 77; wn = 3268)**	.06	.07	.14	.64	.08

27. **What is/are the source(s) of funds supporting this school's continuity activities that are in addition to the regular responsibilities of teaching and administrative staff?** Check all that apply.

*	**	
.38	.79	Local school district
.16	.33	Parent organization
.02	.04	Private foundation
.13	.26	State department of education
.09	.18	Federal agency (Please specify which agency or program):
.03	.06	Other (Please explain):
.52	-	There are no special funds for continuity activities.

(* n = 1163, wn = 43,458; ** n = 584, wn = 20,900 - excludes those responding "no special funds")

28. **What outcomes of this school's continuity activities are evaluated?** Check all that apply.

*	**	
.23	.51	Effects of continuity on children's academic performance
.21	.46	Effects of continuity on children's social behavior
.16	.35	Participation of parents in continuity activities
.26	.58	Teacher satisfaction with continuity activities
.21	.47	Parent satisfaction with continuity activities
.02	.04	Other (Specify): ____________________
.55	-	No evaluations have been done thus far.

(* n = 1163, wn = 43,458; ** n = 526, wn = 19,631 - excludes those responding "no evaluations")

29. **Are there any planned activities in this school designed to help children with transitions through the grades beyond kindergarten?**

(n = 1165; wn = 43,484)

.20 No (Skip to Question 32, page 16.)

.80 Yes ——> 30. **If yes, what type of articulation occurs?** Check all that apply.

.91 Information about students' social, academic, emotional, and physical status is documented and passed on to each child's next teacher.

.90 There is coordination of curricula, materials, or instructional strategies across the early elementary grades.

.73 Joint problem solving about students experiencing difficulty in adjustment is carried out using established guidelines.

.66 Teachers and administrators collaborate to create a formal plan for achieving across-grade educational goals for children.

.29 Early elementary grades are treated as a unified instructional block.
(n = 938; wn = 34,791)

31. **Who has primary responsibility for these activities?** Check one.

.02 Early childhood coordinator

.27 Teacher

.01 Assistant principal

.40 Principal

.05 Other (Please give title/position):

.26 CHECKED MORE THAN ONE

(n = 937; wn = 34,782)

We are interested in your opinions related to the education of children in your school. For each of the statements below, indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree by using the following scale.

SA = Strongly Agree
A = Agree
U = Undecided
D = Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree

(Circle your response)

		SA 1	**A** 2	**U** 3	**D** 4	**SD** 5
32.	Most children in this school will graduate from high school. **(M = 1.69; n = 1107; wn = 41,402)**	.47	.42	.06	.05	.01
33.	Most parents of children in this school are not interested in participating in their children's education. **(M = 4.06; n = 1107; wn = 41,402)**	.02	.10	.06	.46	.37
34.	Teachers in this school work together on projects to improve instruction. **(M = 1.47; n = 1104; wn = 41,264)**	.60	.37	.01	.01	.01
35.	Almost all children from low-income families can achieve at the same level as other students. **(M = 2.12; n = 1105; wn = 41,355)**	.28	.48	.09	.14	.01
36.	Parents are encouraged to participate in school policy decisions. **(M = 2.53; n = 1104; wn = 41,288)**	.16	.44	.17	.21	.03
37.	Prekindergarten or preschool education is essential for children's future success in school. **(M = 2.37; n = 1107; wn = 41,405)**	.32	.26	.17	.22	.03
38.	Almost all children in this school can master grade level skills. **(M = 1.95; n = 1105; wn = 41,369)**	.32	.52	.06	.10	.00
39.	Teachers in this school have no difficulty in communicating with parents about their children's school experiences. **(M = 1.85; n = 1103; wn = 41,257)**	.37	.51	.03	.07	.02
40.	Kindergarten is essential for children's future success in school. **(M = 1.49; n = 1106; wn = 41,393)**	.64	.28	.04	.04	.00
41.	This school is the site of many community activities. **(M = 2.05; n = 1105; wn = 41,368)**	.33	.45	.06	.16	.01
42.	Disadvantaged children who have been in a preschool program (such as Head Start) will do better in school. **(M = 1.83; n = 1104; wn = 41,181)**	.39	.43	.14	.03	.01

PART D: SCHOOL PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

[ ] The remainder of this survey asks about prekindergarten programs. If there are no prekindergarten classes in this school, check this box and skip to item 11 on page 20. You do not need to complete Part D. **.73 checked the box (n = 1167; wn = 43,504)**

1. Check all types of prekindergarten programs that exist in this school:

.51 State or local prekindergarten program administered by the school district

.07 Head Start administered by the school district

.12 Head Start administered by an outside agency

.04 Day care program administered by the school or school district

.08 Day care program administered by an outside agency

.15 Chapter 1 prekindergarten

.06 Other prekindergarten program administered by an outside agency

.38 Special education

.10 Other (Describe):

(n = 326; wn = 11,686 - excludes those who checked box above)

2. **For how many years has a prekindergarten program been continuously offered in this school?**
M = 6.2 Years (n = 324; wn = 11,497)

3. **Please provide the following information about your prekindergarten classes:**

	Total Number of Teachers (FTEs)*	Total Number of Aides (FTEs)*	Total Number of Students Currently Enrolled
a. Head Start (**n = 40; wn = 1433**)	1.6	1.4	28.9
b. Chapter 1 Pre-K (**n = 49; wn = 1742**)	1.3	1.2	33.0
c. State or locally funded pre-K (**n = 145; wn = 5332**)	1.3	1.2	33.9
d. Day care (**n = 18; wn = 687**)	2.0	1.7	27.1
e. Special education (**n = 114; wn = 3800**)	1.3	1.3	13.8
f. Other (Specify): (**n = 34; wn = 1292**)	1.5	1.0	35.6

* Under teachers and aides, give the total number of full-time equivalents (FTEs). For example, if you have one full-time teacher and one half-time teacher that would be 1.5 FTEs. 3 half-time aides would also be 1.5 FTEs.

4. **What criteria are applied in deciding which children to enroll in each of the prekindergarten programs in this school? (Exclude programs specifically designed for special education students.)** Check all that apply under each type of program.

Enrollment Criteria	**State/Local pre-kindergarten (n = 161; wn = 5950)**	**Head Start (n = 47; wn = 1655)**	**Day care (n = 22; wn = 1002)**	**Chapter 1 Pre-kindergarten (n = 54; wn = 1919)**	**Other (Specify:) (n = 43; wn = 1663)**
Age	.91	.92	.53	.90	.78
Family Income	.27	.92	.20	.21	.19
Test Results	.38	.09	.06	.74	.27
Handicapping Condition	.31	.53	.06	.24	.29
Physical/ Health Status	.20	.20	.13	.13	.22
Limited English Proficiency	.27	.06	.06	.33	.12
Other (Specify):	.13	.03	.00	.08	.07
No Eligibility Restrictions	.07	.04	.57	.05	.13

5. **Below is a list of staff development and training opportunities sometimes provided by school systems. Check all the activities made available by this school or district in 1988-89 that at least half of the kindergarten teachers participated in.**

*	**	
.82	.83	Three or more inservice training days
.47	.48	Visits to, or observations of, other schools
.57	.57	Release time for attending early childhood professional conferences
.38	.39	Reimbursement for attending early childhood professional conferences
.30	.31	Enrollment in college or university courses
.07	.08	Other (Specify): ____________
.02	-	None offered in 1988-89

(* n = 313, wn = 11,211; ** n = 303, wn = 10,969 - excludes those responding "none offered")

6. **Are children entering prekindergarten programs assessed with any standardized test, screening, or readiness instrument?**

(n = 325; wn = 11,671)

.31 No (Skip to Question 8.)

.69 Yes ----> 7. **If yes, for what purposes are these tests/instruments administered?** Check all that apply.

.22 Making classroom assignments

.67 Teacher use in individualizing instruction

.65 Meeting federal or state reporting requirements

.20 Other (Please list): ____________________

(n = 233; wn = 7986)

8. **Check all activities provided by this school to involve parents of prekindergarten children in their children's education.** Check all that apply.

.53 Parent education workshops and courses

.61 At-home learning activities to support school objectives

.92 Letters, calendars, newsletters, etc., to provide parents with information about school

.71 Parent volunteers in the classroom

.85 Teacher-parent conferences

.43 Parent education that includes home visits

.43 School committees

.07 Other (Specify): ____________________

(n = 324; wn = 11,627)

9. **Does this school have transition or readiness class(es) for children who are old enough for kindergarten but who are not considered developmentally or academically ready for kindergarten?**

(n = 449; wn = 16,063)

.79 No (Go to item 11.)

.21 Yes ----> 10. **If Yes, how are the children selected?** Check all that apply.

.37 Recommendation of prekindergarten teacher

.53 Recommendation of kindergarten teacher

.22 Recommendation of school counselor

.34 Recommendation of principal

.59 Parent and teacher joint recommendation

.83 Scores on readiness/screening test(s)

.23 External agency recommendation

.50 Parent request

.10 Other (Specify): ____________________

(n = 101; wn = 3351)

11. **Please indicate the name, title, and telephone number of the person completing this form. This information is needed so that we know whom to contact if we have any questions.**

Name (please print): ____________________

Title: ____________________

Telephone: (____) ____________________

TITLE OF RESPONDENT

.84 School principal

.07 Kindergarten teacher

.02 Support staff (e.g., counselor)

.02 Assistant principal

.02 Other

.01 Preschool teacher

(n = 1085)

217

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer these questions. If there is anything else you would like us to know about your early childhood program, especially relating to continuity and transition, please use this space to tell us:

The U.S. Education Department is interested in compiling information on preschool-to-school transition activities. **If you have any documents, plans, brochures, etc., that describe your school transition activities, please send them under separate cover to RMC Research Corporation at the address below.** We are also interested in any evaluation reports describing school evaluations of transition or continuity activities. Please do not include your materials with the survey.

THIS IS THE END OF THE SURVEY. THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION. PLEASE RETURN THE COMPLETED SURVEY IN THE PRE-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE TO:

RMC RESEARCH CORPORATION
TRANSITION STUDY COORDINATOR
400 LAFAYETTE ROAD
HAMPTON, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03842

APPENDIX F

Results of Factor Analysis and Regression Analysis

Factor Analysis of Kindergarten Practices Items

Principal-components analysis yielded two factors. The two factors account for 35% of the total variance. Table F-1 shows the factor loadings of the items loading on each factor.

Table F-1: **Factor Loadings of Items Describing Kindergarten Programs (School Survey Item 13)**

Item No.	Factor 1: Developmental Practices (20.6% of Variance)	Factor Loading F1	Factor Loading F2
13 o	blocks/manipulatives	.700	-.064
13 b	small-group projects	.683	-.049
13 t	creative activities	.615	-.016
13 e	learning centers	.609	-.174
13 u	books read daily	.574	-.024
13 k	evaluate own work	.550	.021
13 m	dictate or write	.540	-.163
13 q	children involved in rules	.530	-.054
13 r	children select activities	.529	-.220
13 s	in/outdoor play daily	.462	.112
13 j	free play daily	.389	.014

Item No.	Factor 2: Academic Practices (14.4% of Variance)	Factor Loading F1	Factor Loading F2
13 d	separate subjects	.008	.705
13 l	worksheets	-.117	.705
13 a	basal reader	-.113	.683
13 g	tested regularly	.136	.649
13 h	grades as motivators	-.034	.633
13 c	quiet	.032	.606
13 p	all should read	.036	.573
13 w	achieve same skills	-.140	.518
13 f	large groups	-.323	.426
13 i	teacher determines learning activities	-.071	.254

Factor Analysis of School Climate Items

Principal-components analysis extracted two factors accounting for 41.4% of the total variance. The factor loadings of the items are shown in Table F-2.

Table F-2: Factor Loadings of Items Describing School Climate (School Survey Items C32-C42)

Item No.	Factor 1: Attitudes Toward Parents and Children (24.7% of the Variance)	Factor Loading F1	Factor Loading F2
39	Teachers can communicate with parents.	.702	-.176
38	Almost all children can master grade level skills.	.680	-.148
32	Most children will graduate.	.552	-.505
41	School is site of community activities.	.533	-.165
34	Teachers work together.	.499	-.086
33	Most parents do not participate.	-.497	.395
35	Low-income children can achieve at same level as others.	.419	.212
36	Parents are encouraged to participate.	.323	.201
Item No.	**Factor 2: Appreciation of Early Childhood Education (16.7% of the Variance)**	**Factor Loading F1**	**Factor Loading F2**
37	Preschool is essential for success.	.268	.757
40	Kindergarten is essential for success.	.406	.595
42	Disadvantaged children in preschool will do better.	.408	.570

Factor Analysis of Transition Activities

Principal-components analysis extracted two factors accounting for 47.8% of the total variance, as shown in Table F-3.

Table F-3: **Factor Loadings of Survey Items Assessing School Transition Activities**

Factor 1: Coordination/Communication (32.2% of Variance)	Factor Loading F1	Factor Loading F2
Communication between kindergarten teachers and previous caregivers about students (C13)	.817	.072
Communication between kindergarten teachers and previous caregivers about curriculum (C14)	.802	.105
Development of a curriculum coordinated with prekindergarten programs (C15)	.711	.152
Transfer of records to kindergarten teachers (C12)	.638	.049
Extent of participation of preschool or daycare staff in continuity activities (C21)	.609	.112
Formality of school policy on continuity activities (C20)	.523	.310

Factor 2: Parent Involvement in Transition (15.6% of Variance)	Factor Loading F1	Factor Loading F2
Formality of arrangements for visits by parents of entering kindergarten students (C17)	-.018	.775
Prevalence of school visits by parents of entering kindergarten students (C16)	.059	.749
Percentage of parents of entering kindergarten students involved in continuity activities (C26)	.190	.688
Informing parents of entering kindergarten students of their rights and responsibilities (C18)	.102	.533
Parent involvement in classroom activities to smooth transition (C19)	.251	.461

Regression Analysis

Using the SPSS PC+ regression procedure, we found that the equation predicting the coordination/communication factor contains seven predictor variables accounting for 19% of the variance. No single predictor accounted for a large proportion of the variance, but the variables that account for the greatest share of the variance in this model relate to three of the areas of influence identified in Chapter IV:

- structural influences (presence of a district or school person responsible for coordinating transition activities, location of preschool);
- attitudes toward children and parents (school climate factor 1 and extent of parent participation in school policies and operations); and
- curriculum (developmental and academic approaches in kindergarten).

These predictors, the adjusted R^2 resulting from adding each additional variable into the model, and the Beta weights are shown in Table F-4.

Table F-4: Survey items Predicting Collaboration/Coordination for Transition

Predictor	**Adj. R^2**	**Beta**
School person responsible for coordinating transition	.068	.129
Preschool program in school	.106	.193
Attitudes toward children and parents (school climate factor 1)	.137	.123
District person responsible for coordinating transition	.159	.156
Developmental practices in kindergarten	.170	.118
Extent parents directly participate in school operations and policy	.177	.093
Academic approach in kindergarten	.188	.085

Nine statistically significant predictors emerged from the regression of the second transition factor, parent involvement in transition. In this case, all four areas of influence discussed in Chapter IV are represented among the predictor variables, which together account for 27% of the variance:

- attitudes toward children and parents (school climate factor 1, parent involvement opportunities);
- curriculum (developmental appropriateness of kindergarten, assignment of children to transition classes, and difficulty children have adjusting to kindergarten);
- structural influences (presence of a district or school person responsible for coordinating transition activities and school enrollment or size); and
- school poverty level (percent eligible for free/reduced price lunch).

These variables are shown in Table F-5. The most important predictor of parent involvement in transition is the school climate factor that seems to reflect the school's attitudes toward parents and children. The schools' provision of parent involvement opportunities is consistent with this, as is a developmental curriculum focus and the perception that children have less difficulty adjusting to kindergarten. Three structural variables are among the predictors, again confirming the importance of having staff assigned responsibility for the transition activities.

Table F-5: Survey items Predicting Parent Involvement in Transition

Predictor	Adj. R^2	Beta
Attitudes toward children and parents (school climate factor 1)	.143	.167
Number of parent involvement activities provided by school	.198	.223
Developmental practices in kindergarten	.218	.162
Difficulty adjusting to kindergarten	.237	-.125
School person responsible for coordinating transition	.249	.096
Percentage of students eligible for free/reduced price lunch	.260	-.123
School enrollment (size)	.267	-.085
Percent of children in transition classes	.270	-.056
District person responsible for coordinating transition	.272	.059

☆U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1992-309-843/50750